Celebrity Scandals and News Treatment in Print and Electronic Media of Pakistan: The Case Study of the *Jang* Group

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the relationship between scandal news, privacy issues and the coverage given to it by the Pakistani print and electronic media. To explore this relationship, the content of the highly viewed news channel Geo News and the highly circulated Jang newspaper is analyzed from September 1 to November 30, 2015. The aim of the study is to examine the portrayal of scandals in both media and also to compare the treatment of Jang and Geo News. Through the content analysis under the light of framing theory, it is concluded that Jang and Geo News gave the extensive coverage to the content of celebrities' scandals. They covered scandal issues with sensationalism and converted small issues into big tragedies. It is also concluded that Geo News left the Jang newspaper behind in covering personal scandals rather than professional scandals. The findings also reject the common assumption that electronic media focus more on scandals than the print media to get the audience attention and increase the rating of the channels because the Jang newspaper gave more coverage of scandals than the prime time bulletin of 9:00 P.M. in Geo News.

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Keywords*: Scandals, Print & Electronic media treatment , Privacy, Sensationalism, Framing.*

Introduction

Mass media is not just a tool for dispersal of information, rather a foundation of making and seminal public opinion. It becomes a way through which people learn things and make decisions regarding their cultural, social, economic and political matters. In old days, when there was no mass media, dissemination of information is mostly done through word of mouth or by using other sources of communication but their reach was very minimal. Only a few people get the information. With the advancement in technology, mass media become the powerful tool of spreading information (McLuhan, 1964). Now media users are high in numbers and they take stance on various things by their exposure to media especially the scandal news which also affect their way of thinking about famous personalities and also about the important issues of country. The history of scandal news in media can be traced back to 1920's across the world but its real boom started in 1990's. Tabloid newspapers are considered as the promoter of scandal news because they are mostly based on muckraking and hidden controversial news stories of human interest (Fox, Sickel & Steiger, 2007).

Scandals and media are interlinked and foremost part of the society. As scandals indicate the malicious activities of the famous persons which are uncovered by media. The scandal of famous persons is like a cherry on the cake for media industry because it is popular among masses. The impact that scandals made in celebrities' life is so strong that they take interest in these kind of news because media coverage can change their reputation and popularity among the public (Just,

2014). On the other hand, the public also takes such issues hand in hand. Media professionals run behind the scandal news and present to grab the audience attention and achieve economic interests. Walter Lippmann described this journalistic situation in a way and added, "the economic necessity of interesting the reader quickly, and the economic risk involved in not interesting him at all" (Lippmann, 1946).

Economic benefits are the foremost priority of any media organization which leads them to highlight the scandal news and hidden stories of famous persons. Global media outlets want exclusive scandal news story to increase their TRP and readership. Especially American and British media particularly focus on these issues and undercover malicious activities (Holmes, 2009). Michael Jackson's personal scandals, American presidents' scandals in American media and Pakistani cricketers' spot-fixing scandals in British media are few examples of the prominence of scandal news in international media.

Pakistani media is also following the footsteps of international media and have started focusing on scandal news stories. From 1965 to 2000, Pakistan electronic media revolve around only 2 to 3 channels and all the channels at that time were controlled by the government. So there was no scope of scandal news in that period of history. But with the privatization of channels and birth of competition since 2002, scandal based news also made their importance in the media industry (Wafayi & Aziz, 2012). Although Pakistani print media has also been trying to highlight corruption scandals from past many years but their impact was not strong as only small number of people prefer scandal related news to read in print media of Pakistan (Raza & Pervaiz, 2014, p. 38).

According to PEMRA, there were 89 channels running in Pakistan in 2012. Those are increasing day by day so as the competition. As number of channels is increasing, the pressure of TRP is also increasing among the channels. To get higher TRP's, Pakistan television channels like international channels also take the support of scandal news. Pakistan electronic media, as well as print media, both are highlighting the scandal based news in great numbers. Steel mills scam case, Exact degree scandal, Malik Raiz's issue, Memo-Gate scandal and many more are highlighted by both media extensively (Wafayi & Aziz, 2012). Panama Leaks, Ayesha Gulalai-Imran Khan's scandal, Imad Wasim's scandal etc. are the recent examples.

Therefore, this paper is an attempt to examine the boom of scandal connected news in Pakistani media in 2015 and the rise of privacy issues. Although this study does not discuss the recent issues but examine the scandal news that were reported in 2015 as these news stories led the foundation for scandal news stories in Pakistani media. The major aim of the study is to address the *Jang* and *Geo News* coverage of scandals from the perspective of privacy issues and sensationalism. It is assumed that due to the pressure of competition and higher TRP, electronic media is using scandal news more than print media so basically, this research aspires to compare the treatment of scandals in print and electronic media of Jang group.

Scandal news have been seen in Pakistani media for very long but during last few years especially in 2015, this issue has got serious attention with its invasion of personal space, the creation of false scandals and interest based image building (Hayat & Imam, 2015). This study sheds light on this issue and focuses on the scandal issues that happened in Pakistan with their backgrounds from September 1, 2015 to November 30, 2015 in Pakistan leading news channel *Geo News* and most

circulated Pakistan newspaper, *Jang*. This study is designed to understand the difference of priority and treatment of scandal based news in electronic and print media of Pakistan. This time period is important as several scandals reported in national media that gave a boom to scandal news in Pakistani media and are still under discussion in the news media. The important reported scandal issues during these three months include:

1. *Ayan Ali's money laundering case*: It is one of the biggest celebrity scandals in 2015. Pakistan super model Ayan Ali was arrested from Islamabad airport for carrying $500,000 dollars with her while traveling to Dubai. This scandal shook the fashion industry and political sector of Pakistan (Gishkori, 2015).
2. *Dr. Asim's scandal*: This scandal had also made a huge impact on the politics of Pakistan. It is a corruption scandal of Dr. Asim who was a former Minister for Petroleum and considered as the close companion of Asif Ali Zardari (Co-chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party). He was arrested by the Rangers in 2015 from Karachi and is still facing the corruption charges.
3. *Nandi Pur Scandal*: Nandi Pur power project is another major corruption scandal that the current Punjab government had faced and National Accountability Bureau is still inquiring the issue.
4. *Benazir Bhutto's murder case and its connection with General Pervez Musharraf*: Benazir murder case and its relationship with Musharraf is another major scandal which has been a part of Pakistan news media since 2007.
5. *Reham-Imran divorce*: The news regarding the marriage of Imran Khan (Chairman, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf) and Reham Khan (TV anchor) got the huge coverage by Pakistani media but the news of their divorce was treated in a most sensationalized manner and also casted an impact on the image of Imran Khan.
6. *Umer Akmal's scandal*: Pakistani cricketer Umer Akmal has always been in news media due to his various scandals but the sexual harassment accusations by Pakistani model Rachel Khan on him in 2015 effected his cricket career (Hussain, 2015).
7. *Amit Mishra's scandal*: Although he is an Indian cricketer but he was also accused of sexual harassment by an Indian woman and this scandal got a great coverage by Pakistani media.

All the above scandals are different from each other and pointing towards the significance of the selection of time period as some of them related to professional fields of the famous persons while some of them are related to personal lives of celebrities. This research attempts to answer the following two research questions:

1. Which of the media (*Jang* newspaper or *Geo news*) gave more coverage to scandal issues in the selected time period?
2. How did both forms of media (*Jang* and *Geo*) portray the scandal issues in the selected time period?

Scandals are not a common subject to be researched in Pakistan because of its sensitive nature. Therefore, this is the first study which would be helpful for media students, media organizations, celebrities and public relations officers.

Literature Review

This study compares the coverage of corruption and personal scandals of politicians and celebrities in electronic and print media of Pakistan and there are no such studies existed in the academic literature that is related to the comparison of print and electronic media with reference to scandal

based news. Therefore, this section is comprised of studies related to corruption and scandals of famous personalities generally. As scandal based news is a new phenomenon in Pakistani news media. So, there is little research on such issue in Pakistan. That is why, only international studies related to the media coverage of scandal news are included.

Corruption scandals are one of the most covered area in both electronic and print media. It often highlights the corruption scandals to uncover the wrongdoings of government and other famous organizations and recognized personalities. So these kinds of scandals and their depiction in media have been a focus of investigation worldwide since decades because of its impact on the audience and media organizations as well (Tella & Franceschelli, 2009). Like in Argentina, a study was conducted by Tella and Franceschelli (2009) in which relationship between the paid advertisements of government and four highly circulated newspapers of the country were investigated. It was concluded that due to the paid advertisements from the government, newspapers avoid to highlight the corruption scandals of government officials to fulfil their economic benefits.

In addition, during covering such issues, sometimes media outlets' personal interests also effect the portrayal of scandals. Such kind of instance can be found in a study based on the coverage of political scandals in newspapers in which data was collected from approximately 200 newspapers about 35 scandals in the US. Puglisi and Snyder (2008) concluded from the result that newspapers supporting the policies of Republican Party highlighted the scandals of Democratic Party while newspapers supporting the policies of Democratic Party gave more coverage to the wrongdoings of Republican Party.

Similarly, Tumber (2004) examined that media coverage of political and financial scandals have a great impact on the popularity of government and ministers in the United Kingdom (Tumber, 2004). Apart from government and ministers, Bowler and Karp (2004) added that the corruption scandals effected political institution and process very adversely. In addition, the US media mostly highlight such kind of scandals especially during presidential election campaigns which effect the image of the candidate (Heldman, Carroll & Olson, 2005; Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu & Seltzer, 2006)

Like corruption based scandals, politicians' personal life scandals are also treated as hot cake in media as Castor (1991) added that the depiction of the private scandal of the Gary Hart with Donna Rice, who was the prominent candidate for the 1988 USA presidential elections from the Democratic Party, in print and electronic media damaged his reputation among his voters. Moreover, Yioutas and Segvic (2003) also analyzed the representation of Clinton-Lewinsky scandal's coverage in media and examined that how media set the agenda against him in 2000 presidential elections. The results indicated that even though he was not the part of those elections but due to the extensive media coverage of his scandal at that time, he and his party faced defeat in the elections.

Moreover, Deacon (2004) argued that competition among media organizations urge journalists to report such kind of incidents and both politicians and media professionals are equally responsible for boosting the trend of reporting private scandals of politicians. This concept was more strengthened by the study conducted in Germany which again emphasized upon the fact that because of competition, media emphasize upon such issues. Reporting on private scandals of

politicians always work as a catalyst to build, reinforce, modify or reject the pre-existing image of any public figure (Bacha, 2004).

Similarly, popular discourses assumed that celebrities often face controversies after being highlighted by media which leave a huge impact on audience perception (Park, Phau, Suh & Martin, 2016). Therefore, the presentation of scandal news about famous personalities and their effect on audience has also been another focus of international academic research to understand the impact of these scandals on audience perception. One of them includes the study on the Martin Bashir's documentary titled as 'Living with Michael Jackson. Barris and Gray (2006) argued that Michael Jackson was framed in this documentary negatively by keeping in view the general concern existed in the United States of America regarding gendered, sexual and racial subjectivities. Another celebrity Jade Goody's reputation and her image before and after British reality show, Big Brother, was also studied by the method of narratives. After scrutinizing the life of Jade Goody from the perspective of media reports, Holmes (2009) added that she was depicted as 'from Zero to Hero', 'from Hero to Zero' and from reflexive to regulated because of her private life and its depiction in media. Therefore, it would not be wrong to write that the media act as maker and breaker of personality's image (Penfold, 2004; Murphy, 2010).

Sometimes famous personalities also use media as the tool of their image repairing. For endorsing this argument, Moody (2011) added that two American television personalities Jon and Kate Gosselin used media to discuss their personal life before and after their divorce happened in 2009 in order to repair their image in public. It was observed that both the personalities used the traditional media as well as social media but the image of Jon was more repaired than that of Kate because he was apologetic and ready to accept his mistakes infront of the public through his appearences on media while discussing his scnadal openly.

In addition, it has been assumed that intervening in the private lives of celebrities and invading their personal space is the biggest allegation on the media industry (Patching, 2014). The study on five well known Australian cricketers (Don Bradman, Keith Miller, Greg Chappell, Shane Warne and Michael Clarke) from 1945 to 2010, pointed out that the media unnecessarily interfere in the famous persons' lives (Patching, 2014).

 All the above studies have discussed the impact and treatment of scandal news by studying print or electronic media news coverage on different issue but this study is different from all the above studies as it is designed to understand the difference in the treatment of news coverage regarding the scandal based news stories in electronic and print media of the same organization. Instead of focusing the scandals case by case, this study focuses on the comparison of print and electronic media of Pakistan in the selected time that makes it unique.

 Framing as a Theoretical Underpinning

To examine the scandal based news in the *Jang* and *Geo* TV, this study is conducted under the umbrella of framing theory. The birth of framing theory was the effort of Erving Goffman (1974) who argued that through social cues, individuals make sense of their everyday life. He also suggested that people acquire these cues by doing interaction with other individuals and from witnessing the usage of these cues in the media content (Baran & Davis, 2011). Later many scholars worked on this theory and pointed out that framing theory is concerned with the frames

that how the event is presented in a particular way to the audience in media to create a desired message (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015).

Basically framing is a process by which an issue is emphasized in the news. Media use frames and offer limitations around a specific news story. Media regulate issues and tell its audience about the worthiness of an issue. Media experts use this technique to inspire the view of the masses. They construct the message in such a way that it would influence the audience by encompassing emotional strategies (Goffman, 1974). Therefore, in this study the news content of *Geo TV* and *Jang* newspaper are analyzed under the light of framing theory.

Methodology

The study is based on content analysis method to examine the portrayal of scandal news in print and electronic media of the same organization. This research includes both quantitative and qualitative method of content analysis as this study does not focus only on frequencies of stories in the newspaper and television but also investigate the framing of scandal news stories. For this purpose, on the basis of purposive sampling technique, news stories that were published in *Jang* newspaper and 9pm daily bulletin of *Geo News* from September 1 to November 30, 2015 are analyzed.

Categorization & Operationalization

For scrutinizing the framing of scandal news in the daily *Jang* and *Geo News*, the coding categories are developed separately. For *Geo News* categories are given below:

    A. Total news
    B. Duration
    C. Type of scandal
    D. Sensationalism

While the coding categories for the *Jang* newspaper include:

    A. Total news
    B. Pages
    C. Importance
    D. Type of scandal
    E. Sensationalism

Operationalization of major categories is the following:

Scandal: the word scandal refers to the suspected wrongdoings of celebrities that destroy their reputation publically. It can be their personal matter or any issue that indirectly affect their repute.
Celebrities. It refers to a person who is well-known or popular personality of Pakistani society. They may belong to the field of politics, government, sports and entertainment/showbiz industry of Pakistan.
Privacy Issues. It refers to the debate that arises due to the coverage of media on private scandal related to the news of celebrities.
Total News: It measures the total number of scandal news printed and broadcasted in *Jang* newspaper and *Geo* television.
Pages: It means on which pages (Front, inner or back) scandal news is printed in *Jang* newspaper.
Importance: It refers to the prominence given to scandal news in the *Jang* newspaper and it is analyzed examining the number of columns that such kinds of news occupy and the air time duration given by television news bulletin.

Type of Scandal. the type of scandal is divided into two categories i.e. personal and professional scandals. This study aims at finding what type of scandal is highlighted by electronic and print media of the same organization.

Sensationalism. The sensationalism is a term that is mostly associated with media. The word 'sensationalism' refers to the selection of words in headline, sub headline and also in the body of news story of the *Jang* newspaper. The word sensationalism also refers to the reporting angle, selection of songs, words and graphics in the 9 pm bulletin of *Geo News*. The category of sensationalism is further divided into three sub categories "favorable (+)", "unfavorable (-)" and "neutral (o)". Favorable means both type of media promote sensationalism, unfavorable means they promote sensationalism and neutral means they only report the facts without using any fabricated element as discussed above to create sensationalism.

Coding and Inter Coder Reliability

To enhance the reliability of this research and validate the findings, two coders are trained for two days and provided with the gathered data. The Holsti's formula is used to check the inter coder reliability. The result indicates 0.88 percent inter coder reliability among all the coders.

Findings and interpretations

This section discusses the findings and interpretations that extracted by analyzing the scandal related news stories in print and electronic media of the *Jang* group. This section is divided into two parts: in the first part, the overall findings that include the analysis of news in *Jang* and news bulletins of *Geo* are illustrated in the tables while in the second part the comparative analysis of both the media on the basis of total news stories, type of scandals and sensationalism are described by using pie and bar charts.

Geo News Coverage and Treatment of Scandals B ased News Stories

The treatment of scandal news by *Geo News* is tabulated on the basis of the deigned categories in the following table:

	Total News	Duration	Type of scandal		Sensationalism		
			Personal	Professional	+	-	o
Geo	245	1 minute	138	107	75	163	7

Table 5.1 indicates the result that is derived from the analysis of *Geo News* 9 pm bulletin. In the time span of three months, 245 scandal news are broadcasted on geo new in 9 PM bulletin. The duration of these kinds of news are mostly one minute. Out of 245 news stories regarding famous personality's scandal, 138 news stories are related to the private life of the celebrities while 107 scandal stories are pointing towards the professional life of the famous persons. It is also found that 163 scandal news were presented in more sensationalized form, 75 stories are presented in less sensationalized manner while only 7 news stories lack the element of sensationalism.

The Jang **Newspaper Coverage and Treatment of Scandals Related News Stories**

The treatment of scandal news in the *Jang* newspaper is described in the following table.

	Total news	Pages	Importance	Type of scandal		Sensationalism		
				Personal	Professional	+	-	o
Jang	398	Inner	1 column	150	248	102	275	21

According to the *table 5.2* the total number of news stories on different scandals published in *Jang* newspaper are 398 in the selected time period. Most of the stories in these three months are published in the inner pages of the newspaper and they mostly occupied one column space in the *Jang*. It was observed that the *Jang* gave more coverage to the professional scandals of the famous personalities as the result shows that out of 398 news stories, 248 are about the professional scandals while 150 news stories are related to the personal scandals of celebrities. The numbers of sensationalized stories in *Jang* newspaper are 275 while 102 scandal news are less sensationalized and only 21 news stories are reported without creating sensationalism.

Above are the individual results regarding treatment and coverage of scandal news in both the medium of the *Jang* group while the comparative analysis of both the organizations are given below.
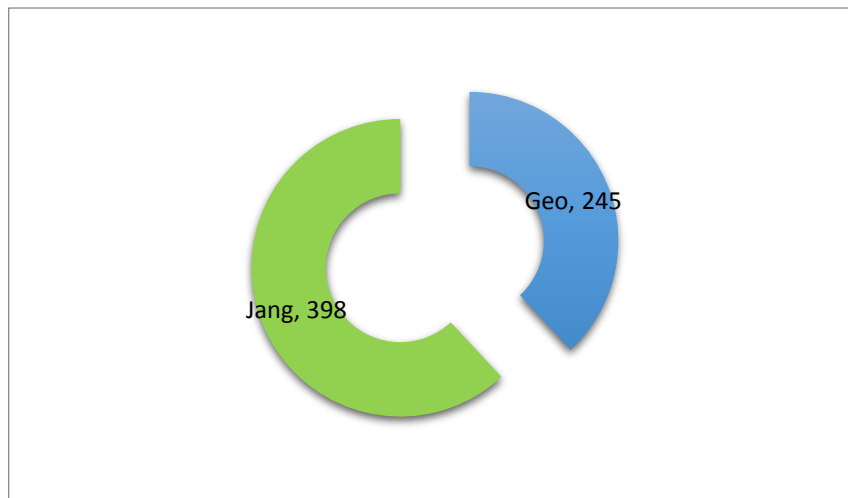

Fig 5.1 total number of scandal news stories in Geo and Jang

As the *fig 5.1* depicted that the *Jang* newspaper gave more coverage to news stories regarding scandals than *Geo news*. So it is observed that print media focuses more on scandal news stories than the electronic media of the *Jang* group.
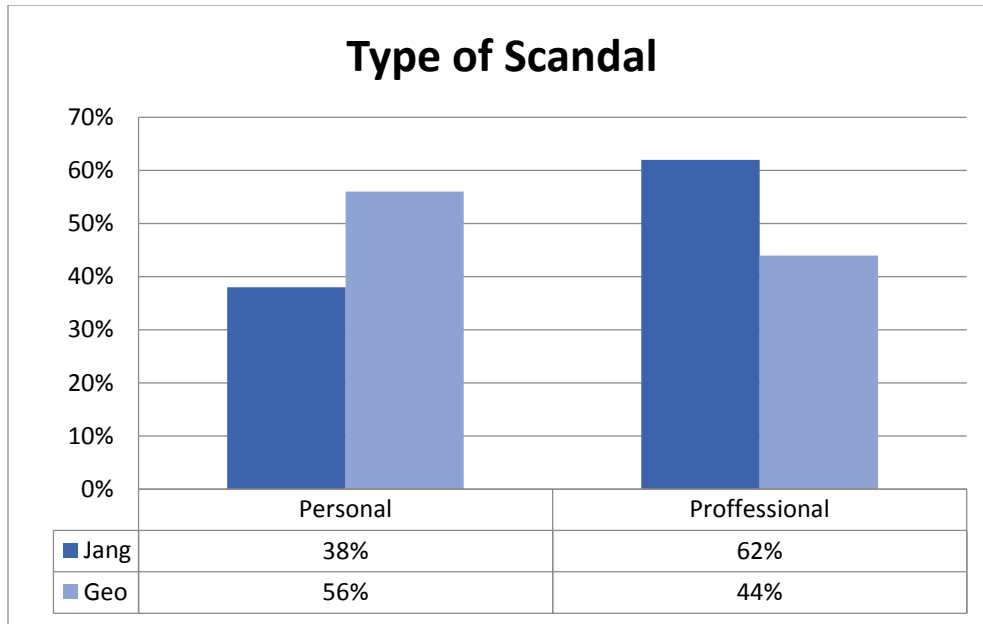
Type of Scandal

	Personal	Proffessional
■ Jang	38%	62%
■ Geo	56%	44%

Fig 5.2 Type of scandal highlighted by Jang newspaper and Geo TV

    Fig 5.2 indicates that *Geo News* was more interested in the coverage of personal life scandals of celebrities than the professional life scandals of the famous persons in the selected time period. At the same time, the *Jang* newspaper highlighted the professional scandals more than the personal scandals. According to the graph, 56% given air space to scandal based news stories on *Geo News* is based upon the personal scandals while 38% of the coverage given to that type of issues by the newspaper. The *Jang* newspaper gave 62 % coverage to the professional scandals while *Geo News* gave 44% air space to the professional scandals of the famous personalities. It was also observed that *Geo News* emphasized more on the personal scandals but also highlighted the professional scandals in the great number while a visible difference can be seen between the coverage of professional and personal scandal in *Jang* newpaper coverage.
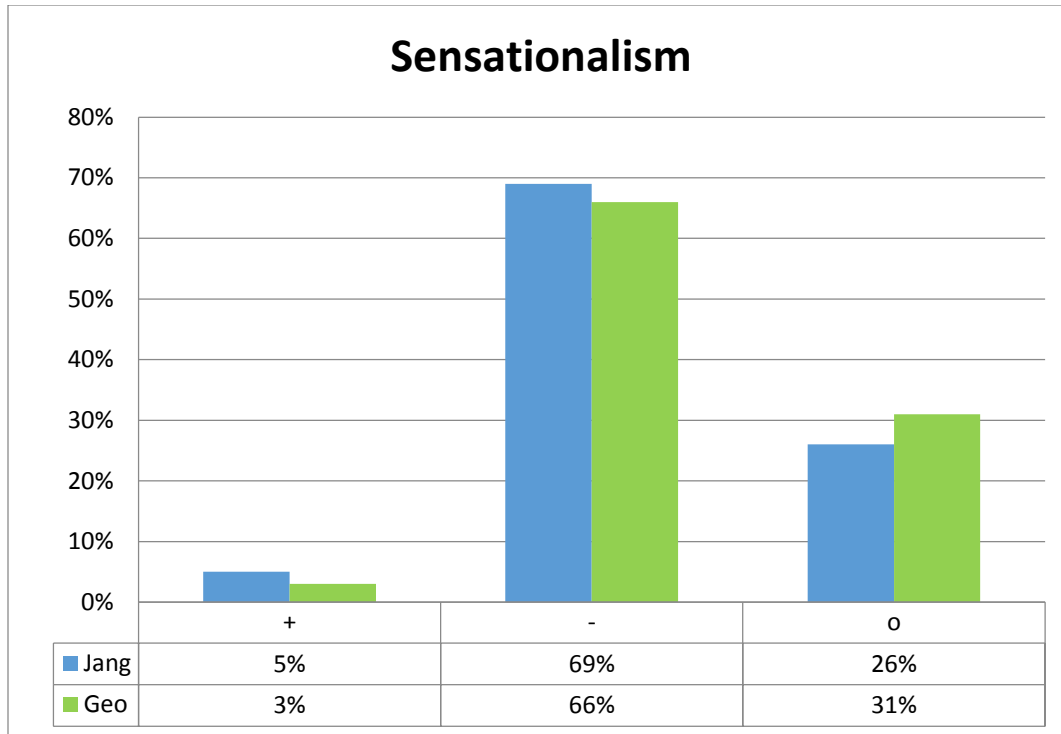
Sensationalism

	+	-	o
■ Jang	5%	69%	26%
■ Geo	3%	66%	31%

Fig 5.3 Sensationalized treatment to scandal based news stories by Geo TV and Jang newspaper

Fig 5.3 elaborates the result that both media of the *Jang* group gave almost equal sensationalized treatment to scandal news stories. 69% in the *Jang* newspaper and 66 % coverage of scandals by *Geo News* are highly sensationalized. As shown in the *fig 5.3*, 5% coverage of *Jang* and 3% coverage of *Geo* are neutral.

Analysis and Discussion

The previous section illustrated that *Jang* newspaper and *Geo TV* both highlighted the scandal related news in great number (*Fig 5.1, Table 5.1 & 5.2*). In three months 398 (*Jang*) and 245 news stories (*Geo*) indicate the importance of scandal news in both the media. It is observed that after political news, scandal news is the most prominent and highly covered subject by *Geo News*. While *Jang* newspaper also focuses on scandal news but fall after political and crime news. While looking for the answer of the first research question, it was observed that both the media gave coverage to scandal related news but *Jang* newspaper gave more coverage to such issues as compared to Geo news. Mostly scandal news stories published in the inner pages of the *Jang* newspaper in these three months (*Table 5.2*) but it was noted that sometimes, such type of news cover the whole upper half of the front page like during Reham-Imran divorce. It was also observed that not a single day left when there was no scandal news in the front page of *Jang* newspaper but most of the news in term of numbers published in the inner pages in these three months. Results indicate that scandal news occupied one column space in the *Jang* newspaper (*Table 5.2*) and one minute duration in *Geo News* (*Table 5.1*) but it was found that the *Jang* newspaper often highlighted the scandal related news in its lead and super lead but in terms of numbers, mostly scandal based news are of one column. While the *Geo News* mostly allot one minute duration to one scandal news but most of the time, first half of the bulletin (From 9:00 to 9:30 pm) are fully dedicated to scandal based news stories.

While looking for the answer of the second research question regarding the portrayal of scandal news, it was observed that *Geo News* highlighted the personal scandals of celebrities in much more sensationalized way than the *Jang*. It was also found that both media raised privacy issues but *Geo News* emphasized more on private lives of celebrities than the *Jang* newspaper. In addition, it was also observed that the trend of sensationalism to portray the scandals in both media is predominantly common.

Conclusion

This study aspires to investigate the portrayal and treatment of scandal based news with reference to privacy concerns of celebrities and sensational elements in print and electronic media of the *Jang* group. On the basis of content analysis, it is concluded that *Jang* and *Geo News* gave the extensive coverage to the content of celebrities' scandals from September to November 2015. They covered scandal issues with sensationalism and converted small issues into big tragedies. It is also concluded that *Geo News* left the *Jang* newspaper behind in covering personal scandals rather than professional scandals. The findings also reject the common assumption that electronic media focus more on scandals than the print media to get the audience attention and increase the rating of the channels because the *Jang* newspaper gave more coverage of scandals than the prime time bulletin of 9:00 P.M. in Geo News.

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