



THE ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES JOURNALISTS FACE IN PRACTICING PEACE JOURNALISM IN ENGLISH AND URDU NEWSPAPERS DURING PAKISTAN'S CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE

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Abstract:

Pakistan's media landscape can be easily divided into Urdu and English streams. Since Urdu is Pakistan's national language and is spoken throughout the country, so Urdu journalism finds a wide readership. Meanwhile, the readers of English journalism are limited to upper-middle and resourceful circles. Both streams appear to follow different foci and working styles. During the past few years (2018-2023), in the polarized situation of Pakistani politics, both media streams performed differently, which has caused ethical considerations and challenges for journalists in practicing peace journalism.

The study focuses on the ethical challenges faced by Pakistani journalists engaged in peace journalism, particularly within the context of the political climate prevalent in the country for the selected period (2018-2023). Drawing from Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), this study explores how language barriers and cultural differences shape journalists' approaches to peace journalism in Pakistan. By employing in-depth interviews with journalists of Urdu and English journalistic streams, we also seek to understand the ethical considerations and challenges journalists face practicing peace journalism in English and Urdu newspapers in



Pakistan's current political climate.

Keywords: Urdu Journalism, English Journalism, Peace Journalism, Pakistani Politics, Polarization

Introduction

Pakistan is observing political turmoil and instability crises for the past many years (Jamal, 2023). The situation has become more critical before and after the general elections of Feb 8, 2024. There is an ongoing tug-of-war between two major political blocks, which are Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the rest of the establishment-supported alliance of all other political parties. In this tense political situation, it is challenging for journalists to practice peace journalism and provide balanced and unbiased coverage. Earlier, before the incident of May 9, 2023, many media organizations in Pakistan were competing to gain financial benefits with their partial reporting, which resulted in polarization in the country's political climate. (Jamal, 2023).

Ethical reporting requires journalists to adhere to principles of truth and impartiality, which are particularly important in peace journalism. Peace journalism, as introduced by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), emphasizes balanced and accurate reporting that contributes to conflict resolution rather than escalating violence (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2006). By identifying factors in favor of and against peace, peace journalism aims to explore potential solutions and create constructive outcomes (Galtung, 2015).

Operating within an ethical landscape encompassing conflict and political instability presents journalists with complex challenges. Pursuing peace through journalism is admirable but comes with ethical considerations and difficulties. These challenges are particularly pronounced in Pakistan's current political climate. Pakistan's political landscape is characterized by ongoing conflicts, socio-political issues, and tensions with neighboring countries (Rashid, 2012). Journalists face considerable ethical and practical challenges in reporting on these matters. Furthermore, the language barrier and cultural differences further shape Pakistan journalists' approach to peace journalism. Urdu is Pakistan's national language and the most widely spoken language in the country. However, English is the language of the country's ruling class and the language of international communication. Most of the literature about peace journalism is written in English, which can limit the reach and accessibility of peace journalism to the majority of the population who may not be proficient in English (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Since the literature on peace journalism is not available in Pakistani local languages, it limits the application of peace journalism by local journalists.

Both English and Urdu newspapers have distinct audiences within the country, and every audience faces different challenges. English newspapers focus on an urban and educated class. In their articles, they freely discuss sensitive issues in depth (Nawaz, 2016). However, they ensure that they do not cross sensitive limits and do not hurt the sentiments of the audiences in complex and sensitive political and religious issues.

In contrast, Urdu newspapers cater to a broader audience, most of whom belong to rural backgrounds with a basic level of education. They have to convey complex issues in the simplest



way, which is undoubtedly a big challenge (Nawaz, 2016). Due to their large circulation, these newspapers have to face external pressures that limit their exposure to sensitive topics. Sometimes, the language used in these papers creates misunderstandings or frames a situation differently leads toward conflict and violence.

In Pakistan's current political situation, practicing peace journalism requires a delicate balance between neutrality, passion for truth-seeking, and a motivation for peace promotion. Keeping the ethical considerations in mind, peace must be communicated with sensitivity, respect, and a strong sense of responsibility. This study aims to address the following research questions:

- 1- How do language barriers and cultural differences shape the approach to peace journalism in Pakistan?
- 2- How do Pakistani journalists navigate to promote constructive and inclusive dialogue in Pakistani politics?

With these research questions, we seek to explore the role of language and cultural intricacies in promoting peace journalism and conflict resolution.

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Censorship, regulations, and political pressures are not unfamiliar to Pakistani journalists. (Yesil, 2014). On many occasions, journalists have gone through very challenging situations. They try to be impartial and balanced in their political, social, and economic reporting, which is hard nut to crack (Hussain et al., 2023). Peace journalism deals with reporting and writing about the main issue which have potential of triggering conflicts in any country. Since 2008 the concept of media and peacebuilding is being taught in big Universities of Pakistan. The curriculum focuses on the importance of peace and conflict resolution and emphasizes understanding the concept of peace journalism and techniques for reporting in conflict areas. Pakistani media fabric is made of the threads of Urdu and English outlets. This literature review helps to study the ethical and linguistic considerations and concerns faced by Pakistani journalists in practicing peace journalism while covering political issues within their respective English and Urdu news organizations.

In peace journalism, a journalist tries to reach the roots to understand the ethical considerations and challenges. Galtung (1970) introduced the concept of peacebuilding, and Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) further developed the idea into peace journalism. They proposed that conflict reporting should be more than the portrayal of violence only. The main objective of peace journalism promotes understanding the core of the issue to explore the potential solutions of the problem. This type of journalism also believes in reconciliation through dialogues. The old paradigm of war journalism is rejected by the supporters of peace journalism to promote a more constructive and transformative approach to reporting. In an article, Galtung condemns traditional way journalism because it leads to conflict and spreads violence. Any style of reporting that ignites conflict by emphasizing sensationalism, popularization, and polarization is considered against society and humanity. On the other hand, peace journalism only works for the welfare of society and the world at large. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of conflicts and a more nuanced approach toward nonviolent alternatives and peacebuilding initiatives (Galtung, 1998).

While outlining the principles of peace journalism in their book, Lynch and McGoldrick



(2005) emphasized the importance of accuracy, fairness, and context in reporting conflicts. Lynch and McGoldrick argued that peace journalism should voice marginalized perspectives, avoid demonizing the "enemy," and explore underlying causes and potential solutions. From the lens of Lynch and McGoldrick, if we see Pakistani society, we observe that the difference of opinion and ideology creates opponents that are demonized later on. International relations between Pakistan, India, and the US have long been wrecked by friction, distrust, and competing interests (Kaltenthaler & Miller, 2015). While anti-Indian sentiments have existed here for decades. Efforts are made to normalize the relations and initiate peace, and mutual cooperation is occasionally made. Peace journalism emphasizes the continuous efforts of media professionals as peacebuilders and facilitators of public dialogue.

Peace journalism aims to contribute to conflict resolution by exploring the underlying causes and dynamics of conflicts and highlighting nonviolent strategies for resolution (Hanitzsch, 2007). Relevant to this aim, a study on Pakistani media was conducted. Since linguistically, two parallel streams of journalism exist in the Pakistani media landscape, the same objective of peace journalism was studied in Urdu and English newspapers. The watchdog role of journalism is the key element of peace journalism, which promotes transparency and accountability. It also acts as a guardian against abuses of power and injustice. The authors found that the performance of the watchdog role of the editorials of the English language dailies was comparatively better than those of the Urdu language dailies (Siddique & Rahman, 2019). A few more studies compared the English and Urdu streams of Pakistani journalism. Another comparative discourse analysis of Pakistani English and Urdu newspapers where the authors found the positive role of English newspapers in the promotion of dialogue and understanding among conflicting parties and facilitating the settlement process (Auranfzaib et al., 2021), which is another objective of peace journalism. Similarly, a few more studies also endorse the proactive and positive role of English journalism in advancing Lynch and McGoldrick's model of peace journalism (Khan, 2021; Zaheer, 2020; Hussain et al., 2021).

Patriotic and elite-controlled media produced more escalation as compared to conflict in which journalists were using relatively free media. Khan (2019) explored news framing of the Kashmir conflict in the Dawn newspaper—a leading Pakistani English newspaper—and found a comparatively balanced and peace-oriented style of journalism (p. 5). The newspaper placed the conflicts within the boundaries of social, political, and historical frameworks, which enabled readers to follow the intricacies and root causes of problems.

Some of the significant challenges peace journalism faces in Pakistan are censorship and media control. A comparative analysis of three Martial Law regimes in Pakistan showed the implementation of authoritarian press indicators in the ears of General Ayub Khan and General Zia ul Haq. However, the third era of General Pervaiz Musharraf practiced libertarian theory (Afzal & Siddiqui, 2016). Generally, media work under the substantial influence of the government in Pakistan. This phenomenon minimizes the scope and range of peace journalism. Journalists who report on sensitive issues, such as human rights violations or military interventions, may face harassment, censorship, or even violence (Ahmed, 2020). This creates a frightening effect on peace journalism and limits the ability of journalists to report on conflicts in a balanced and impartial



manner. In Pakistan, there are many indirect ways for media censorship like stopping revenue of advertisements from public sector or pressurizing and influencing journalists by using different means instead directly shutting down media houses (Nasir, 2020).

Another challenge facing peace journalism in Pakistan is the influence of political and religious ideologies on media reporting. Due to the popularity of Urdu journalism, Urdu Journalists are always under pressure to report and publish the thoughts of big political parties and religious leaders. Publication of popular and dominant thoughts sometimes raises objections from the other side. (Shafi, 2018). The media organizations in Pakistan are not only divided by language wise but there are divisions according to their political and ideological interests. As we see the groups news channels who are pro-government and others are the part of opposition, this may create biases in reporting.

Peace journalism always shows concern about the safety and well-being of journalists who work on sensitive issues. Generally, political and religious extremist groups target journalists and their respective organizations to gain their desired results (Ahmed, 2020). After studying the aforementioned literature, we feel a dearth of exploration of the intricacies of language and culture that shape journalists' approach to peace journalism. Also, it is essential to study the skills and techniques that enable journalists to promote constructive and inclusive dialogue in the Pakistani political landscape.

Research Methodology

In this study, we used in-depth interviews to collect data. This qualitative research method is suitable for gathering detailed and nuanced information from participants, allowing us to have a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and perspectives (Adams & Cox, 2008).

Sixteen journalists confirmed their availability, but out of sixteen, only fifteen journalists were able to make it to the interviews. After the interviews, we realized that the sample size of 15 participants was big enough to allow for a thorough exploration of the research questions. The sample size also allowed us to ensure the depth and richness of data. Fifteen selected working journalists from Urdu and English news organizations participated in the in-depth interview process. We ensured that all journalists belonged to mainstream media outlets in Pakistan. To ensure diversity, we hand-picked seven journalists from Urdu and eight from the English stream. All participants were selected based on their rich (five to twenty years) experience and involvement in reporting on current political affairs.

We developed an interview guide to ensure consistency across the interviews. The questionnaire consisted of eight open-ended questions. These questions were designed in the light of the study's research questions. Most of our interviews were in-person, but in some cases, we used online platforms, depending on the feasibility and preferences of the participants. We recorded all interviews with the consent of participants to ensure the accuracy of the data collection. the average duration of all interviews was 30-50 minutes.

The audio recordings of the interviews are precisely transcribed. A thematic analysis is employed to analyze the interview data. This involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Initially, a preliminary coding



framework is developed based on the research questions. The data is then coded using this framework, and new codes or themes are formed during the coding process. Finally, the codes and themes are organized into coherent patterns, allowing for the development of meaningful findings.

We observed the following ethical considerations while conducting this study:

- a. Informed consent is obtained from each participant before conducting the interviews. All participants are provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality, and their rights as participants.
- b. In this study, participants' identities are kept confidential, and any information that could potentially identify them or their organizations is removed for anonymity.
- c. All interview data, including audio recordings and transcriptions, are securely stored and accessible only to the research team. The data will be retained for a specific period according to the required ethical guidelines and regulations. Due to the qualitative nature of the research and the small sample size, the findings may only be generalizable to some of the population of journalists in Pakistan or other contexts. However, the study will help to understand the role of sensitive peace reporting during the current political crises in Pakistan.

Discussion

The data presents diverse perspectives on the applicability and understanding of peace journalism within Pakistani Urdu and English journalism. Here is the crux of journalists' viewpoints. All interviewees were familiar with the term peace journalism. Most of them were practicing the same at various levels. Some have learned about the concept through formal training programs, workshops, seminars, or personal research, while a few acknowledged a lack of formal training. Interviewees were skeptical regarding the applicability or effectiveness of peace journalism within Pakistani society. Some journalists believe journalism aims to provide news coverage rather than actively attempting to solve the conflict or promote peace.

Participants highlight various challenges in implementing peace journalism in Pakistan. For example, there needs to be more knowledge and understanding of peace journalism among senior journalists, institutional divisions within the media and other sectors, and perceived risks associated with attempting peace-oriented reporting. Many journalists share their personal experiences about the concept of peace journalism. They have participated in workshops, seminars, and training programs or have done field reporting, keeping the ideology of peace journalism in mind. This shows that peace journalism is becoming popular in Pakistan, and the Pakistani journalistic community engages in solution-oriented reporting.

Urdu/English Journalists' Perception of Peace and Conflict Coverage in Pakistan:

Participants from Urdu and English news organizations presented nuanced and often debated topics. In Pakistan's context, their viewpoints illuminate the intricacies and challenges faced in incorporating peace-oriented reporting into their work.

Skepticism regarding the application of peace journalism in Pakistan is the prominent theme that appears in the statements of journalists. A journalist from an Urdu news organization



stated that "peace journalism does not apply to Pakistani journalism," talking about this, he quoted Mushtaq Yousfi—a renowned Urdu satiric writer—that we are so “peace-oriented” as a nation that our biggest newspaper is called *Jang* (which means War). Two more Urdu journalists further endorse this doubt by saying, "Peace Journalism cannot work." This reflects a belief among most journalists practicing Urdu Journalism in Pakistan that the nature of problems and conflicts in this region may not be aligned with the significant techniques of Peace – Journalism. On the other hand, English journalists have slightly different perspectives on peace journalism. These perceptions raise concerns that either principles of peace journalism cannot address the conflict issues of Pakistani society or that journalists need to be fully trained and skilled to apply these principles.

Awareness and Exposure of Urdu/English Journalists:

An Urdu journalist with ten years of field experience said the senior journalists he worked with needed to learn about peace journalism. Opportunities to learn new trends are very limited in Pakistani Urdu news organizations. The channels and newspapers do not offer workshops or training sessions, nor do the journalists have spare time to participate in training courses or workshops for several days. Because the daily routine of a journalist is very tough, most journalists must find a way to afford unpaid study leave for several days to participate in a course to enhance their knowledge. He also underlined a gap in education and awareness within the Urdu journalistic community. The lack of formal training in peace journalism hinders the integration of peace-oriented reporting practices.

Despite the lack of formal training and skepticism about peace journalism, there are some examples of development towards practicing peace journalism among Urdu journalists. A young journalist with two years of experience mentioned his experience of attending peace journalism workshops organized by the Lahore Press Club. He also indicates the efforts of mass communication departments of some universities to educate journalists on this approach. A few female journalists from English media point out that young journalists who graduated in media studies are aware of new concepts of peace journalism. They referred to some of their stories in which they played a responsible journalistic role and used peace-building techniques in conflict reporting. They also try to update their knowledge by attending and participating in short courses and workshops. This indicates a potential shift towards a more informed and conscientious approach to reporting on conflict and peace.

Another notable aspect of the journalists' perspectives is the acknowledgment of risks associated with advocating for peace journalism. Some journalists refrain from conflict reporting due to risks and challenges. The journalism profession sometimes requires dedication and courage to face the challenges of unstable situations.

Overall, the conversation with Urdu and English news organization journalists uncovers different levels of peace-journalism awareness, skepticism, challenges, and a sense of responsibility. Some journalists question the applicability of peace journalism within the context of Pakistan. In contrast, others make informed choices in their writings and reporting with the help of the concepts and awareness of peace journalism. There is a need for formal training and a deeper



understanding of peace journalism, and a proactive role of journalists is necessary for conflict resolution and to contribute towards peacebuilding.

Language Barriers and Cultural Influences

Language and culture significantly influence reporting and writing from diverse regions. The study participants highlighted the importance of understanding and knowing the language and culture for effective communication.

Pakistan is a culturally diverse land where people speak more than 70 languages. Urdu is Pakistan's national language, which is why most people use it as a medium of communication. Away from metropolitan cities, regional languages are predominant; journalists often confront language barriers that hinder effective communication and reporting. This is a big challenge for journalists covering stories from interior Sindh, Baluchistan, or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) regions. These areas prefer their regional languages over Urdu. A journalist shared his experience covering election stories from Balochistan; he said that when people speak another language apart from their mother tongue, they cannot express their expressions as efficiently. We cannot ask direct questions, which can sound unpleasant, and we cannot expect them to express themselves fully.

The issue of language is not restricted to news writing alone. Sometimes, the language barrier can limit you to secondary sources of information. For example, the chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto, knows very little Urdu and does not understand any other language spoken in Pakistan so that this situation can hinder communication between journalists and politicians. Similarly, Urdu Journalists who do not know the English language cannot check the authenticity of international news, and due to the language barrier, they have to believe what they get.

Two of the participants draw attention to communication constraints and cultural sensitivities. They mentioned the limitations of expressing oneself fully in a second language. They said you lose most of your expression if you do not have complete command over a language. This restriction stops journalists from asking questions or participating in conversations or discussions. Moreover, a few participants emphasized the significance of cultural understanding in journalism. Talking about cultural differences, they mentioned that it is a journalist's job to know who they are covering, what they should ask, and what the response would be. Sometimes, cultural nuances present more significant challenges than language barriers. These cultural issues are further combined with issues of translations and interpretations. A journalist from a Karachi-based Urdu newspaper highlighted the translation problem in the province of Sindh. He said that Sindhi is a widely spoken language in Sindh, but people rely on Urdu channels for news and views, which is sometimes hard to understand for locals. So, different text interpretations mislead the reader and create other discourses. Generally, the participants mentioned a range of language barriers and cultural issues associated with language and understanding levels. Participants emphasized the balance of language competency and cultural awareness for balanced reporting.

Political Climate and Peace Journalism: Challenges and Constraints of local journalists

The political environment always has a substantial impact on the practice of journalism in



any country. The pursuit of peace journalism is also based on the multi-dimensional approach that requires a collective effort from media professionals, policymakers, civil society, and the public. The turbulence in the political landscape leads to many challenges and constraints for journalists. It significantly influences the abilities of journalists to report objectively and promote peace. Participants mentioned extensive political pressure on news organizations. A journalist from a Lahore-based Urdu newspaper explicitly mentioned that the policies of their news organizations bind journalists. He further talked about an incident when he was strictly stopped from saying the name of Imran Khan (Chairman of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf) in his article. Not only individual journalists but the entire media organizations sometimes face the political pressure of governments. Journalists are often compelled to support political parties which are in power. They try to incentivize journalists to gain their favor. News organizations are also obliged with the help of government advertisements. A participant also highlighted the case of Arshad Sharif as an example of not accepting the dictation from the pressure groups.

The English and Urdu press face the issue of “limited freedom of speech. Although the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression when the policies come to the implementation stage, the laws are interpreted differently, said an experienced Urdu Journalist. The situation becomes more complicated with the involvement of government institutions (e.g., DGPR, PID, ISPR, etc.). People do not have political views, and their opinions are based on what they have heard or followed for a long time. In this case, whatever the article or consideration they are given in favor of any political party, they do not believe it.

The need for more training and knowledge about peace journalism and training in promoting peace dialogues is a big challenge to developing peace journalism in Pakistan. The journalists and reporters publish or prepare the news, which is a public demand. They prefer popularity over quality. Most participants wanted more than the safety and security of journalists in Pakistan. They question freedom of speech and impartial reporting for the peacebuilding in the country.

Conclusion

The overall thematic analysis of data gained through in-depth interviews reveals an array of areas that need to be considered to understand the different functioning of English and Urdu press in Pakistan. Especially in the study of peace journalism, the discussion of interviewees revolved around the following themes: (a) uncertainty about the practice of peace journalism, (b) the impact of the political climate on the practice of peace journalism, (c) language and cultural barriers faced by journalists for the practice of peace journalism, and (d) strategies for promoting constructive and inclusive dialogue by Pakistani journalists.

Another two significant themes that arise from the responses of journalists are an increased polarized media environment and a lack of journalistic training, especially for rookies. A diversified focus and polarization of media (especially television) have been evident factors in the past few years. Although driven by media ownership structure and unhealthy competition, journalists in Pakistan face deadline pressures and ultimately tend to compromise on the quality and accuracy of content to meet tight deadlines. Moreover, an unregulated media ownership



structure has led to a model in the media industry that is primarily driven by commercial interests. For this reason, personal or organizational benefits seem to supersede journalistic ethics and goals. In addition to this, although most journalists in Pakistan have little or no training in this academic discipline, even those with some journalist training are devoid of training in conflict resolution or mediation. This problem can be further exacerbated if Urdu journalists lack the English language skills that can connect them to foreign writings and scholarship. Thus, in this context, language and cultural barriers play a significant role in the practice of peace journalism. By cultural barriers, we mean gender-based restrictions and sometimes cultural limitations, such as problems related to approaching elders and chieftains of tribal/community areas.

Here, we would like to come back to the idea of polarization of Pakistani media that impedes the promotion of a constructive dialogue, consequently leading to the rise of biases. Although mostly subtle, at times, this separation is apparent in Urdu and English newspapers. For this reason, instead of promoting a healthy dialogue, most news transmissions (especially television talk shows) appear to be a battleground for conflicting parties in Pakistani mass media. This situation can also be observed in Pakistani print media.

Overall, the study reflects Pakistani media's struggle to practice peace journalism. Uncertainty, lack of training, and significant cultural or institutional barriers compound the situation. Although there are efforts (both on individual and institutional levels) to create awareness, protect sources, and promote peace journalism, Pakistani media still has a long way to go.

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