



JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL OF INFLUENCES ON CONFLICT REPORTING

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the variation in journalists' perceptions with respect to the influences on reporting from the conflict zones across different provinces. The present study aims to bring new insights on power of various influences as proposed by previous studies and theories and examine the perceptions of the journalists across conflict zones in Pakistan. The results showed that individual level influences are important for conflict reporting. It is evident that personnel background, professional background, educational level, training, experience, gender and religious sect of the journalist influences the journalist work in the conflict zone. Hence, we observe significant differences in respondents' perception about various items of individual level of influences. The results show that religion influenced journalists' work to a great extent as the militants use the religious card emotionally. The participants expressed that if the journalists try to cover a story that goes against them, the blame is put on the concerned journalists as to be anti-religion and anti-Islam because the militants consider themselves to be the true upholders of the religion. Hence, the respondents termed this scenario as confusing working environment for journalists who feel themselves insecure in such circumstances that, of course, affected their professional duties. Some of the conflict reporters viewed that though religious ideology has tremendous impact on



conflict reporting, however it can be minimized by establishing the fact that journalists are not taking side of any party involved in conflict.

Keywords: Hierarchy of Influences Model, Individial Level of Influences, Conflict Reporting

1. Introduction

A journalist's job is to find news and to report on it as quickly as possible, in an arresting and engaging style so while reporting on a local planning decision or a dramatic international conflict, a journalist plays very vital role in society. In many cases journalists got murdered, expelled or harassed. They have to face even existence of censorship and self-censorship in the media. This worse hatred against journalists has degenerated into violence and an increase in fear for working journalists. According to World Press Freedom Index (2019), there are number of countries regarded as very un-safe have increase and even the most developed countries where journalists are allowed to work in complete security, continues to decline.

For the sake of their contribution to freedom of expression, democracy and peace, every journalist takes its profession as an exciting and challenging task even sometimes glamorous and prestigious but still it demands hard work and smart work. It involves learning on the run, handling the pressure of deadlines and not knowing what the working day will be like from one day to the next. Furthermore, it requires physical and interactive skills emphasizing more on intellectual knowledge and up-to-dated information. This high level of commitment wants a journalist to have a nose for news, eyes over fast pace changing world around him by managing any odd situation and gathering right information or news required for reporting. But this information seeking job is not a piece of cake as many fatal attacks occurred in countries previously unaffected by such extreme acts of violence against journalists. However, not all regions got affected at the same degree. In 2017, the largest number of killings took place in the Asia and the Pacific region (34% of all killings), while in 2016, the largest number of killings occurred in the Arab States (31% according to (IPDC, 2018).

As journalism is a unique and specialized career that is not made for everyone, so there are certain qualities needed for a journalist in order to achieve success, not all of which are common or easy. For a Pakistani Journalist, this profession is not bed of roses at all. It not only calls for a curious mind and the passion for gaining and sharing knowledge but also important to be willing to escape your comfort zone to collect and share information. Pakistani journalist must have some of the necessary qualities, might be inherent parts of a journalist's personality; others, gained through experience and discipline.

Hussain and Lynch (2018) investigates the existing journalistic practices in three deadly conflicts in Pakistan and also proposes corrective peace-oriented media strategies. The authors advocated a pragmatic form of peace journalism that reflects the ground realities as compared to the more critical form of peace journalism that becomes difficult to be practiced in conflict



scenarios.

However, few would deny that the role of media and standard of journalist in Pakistan is very powerful. But it is very harsh reality that both get influenced by the factors, pertaining to the characteristic of media institutions themselves. Countries where media is directly regulated by the state institutions are less independent and trustworthy. On the other hand, media regulated by private groups are independent and citizens oriented (Hanan et.al, 2016).

Conflict has affected every social practice in institution in some way, which ultimately affects the five levels of influences. Furthermore, it is difficult to capture the impact of one influence on media content in isolation from the other influences. e.g., institutional and organizational level of influences have some common indicators. Similarly, routine and organizational level of influences have some common indicators.

The hierarchy of influences model can help little in this regard. The pioneer work of Shoemaker and Reese (1996) offered this model mainly focused on conflict journalism/reporting by presenting different hierarchy of influences that can/cannot affect professional autonomy of the journalists while working in conflict area. In fact, influences as barriers can hinder the professional autonomy of the journalists while poor field planning and weak post-coverage analysis. It is also linked with pathetic activities and disorganized actions including both lack of time and resources. Too frequently, journalists drop in and out of conflict areas without sufficient preparation and understanding of the local context. They also work with tight deadlines and lack the time needed to build and understand local relationships. So, they really suffer due to conflicts. But hierarchy of influences model finds something more about it. It postulates that factors affecting media content can be usefully classified at different levels of analysis by leading and organizing all into a model. The hierarchy of influence model organizes what have been laid out as various theoretical perspectives on the shaping of media content. The present study aims to examine the variation in journalists' perceptions with respect to the influences on reporting from the conflict zones across different provinces. The present study is aimed to bring new insights on power of various influences as proposed by previous studies and theories and examine the perceptions of the journalists across conflict zones in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the relevant literature concerning journalists' reporting from the conflict zones and explores the perceived influences which affect journalists' reporting from the conflict zones. It further reviews the links between different levels of influences that determines the outcome of the conflict reporting. It also highlights the association among various influences and conflict reporting. Although the literature on the conflict reporting is vast and diverse however, this chapter skims those studies, which have specifically identified factors that influences journalists' reporting in the conflict and war zones around the world. This chapter is divided into various themes, which are detailed below:



Many research studies prod that working conditions and job satisfaction positively correlated (Akhtar and Pratt, 2017; Allen, 2023; Ashraf, 2019, 2021; Ashraf and Lisa, 2017; Collins et al., 2022; Hussain and Ahmad, 2022; Hussain, 2019; Hussain and Lynch, 2018; Hussain, Siraj and Mahmood, 2021). While having Journalism as profession, the working conditions under which a job is performed can be different. These working condition ranges from comfortable to highly difficult and dangerous and in some cases life threatening situations. These difficult working conditions can be influenced by both external and internal factors. The external factors include climate, meteorological conditions, temperature, working environment, workplace safety, noise and interference, social pressures, field toughness and other harmful factors. While the internal factors include gender, age, fatigue, motivation, monotony. It further includes factors related to the organization like duration of the work shift, work schedule, working time, and work pace etc. The journalists have to work not only in dangerous and conflict zone but with very unpleasant pace of work as well. They keep communities informed and satisfy the public's right to know. The profession demands discursive norms and untiring practices and organizational mechanisms enfolding successive sections of the population into democratic society (Allen, 2023).

Singh (2013) elaborates the idea of media over-reliance on elite political sources and its repercussions. He indicated that journalists try to dramatize the action and violence by adding value to the news product as the media treat the news as commodity to be sold in the market. This level is also explained as extra media level influences (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016).

Ozgunes & Terzis (2000) argued that media reporting in conflict lead to aggravate the situation between the two countries. On the contrary, others have found that media in conflict reporting helps as a peace agent. However, there is greater role of agenda and outlining setup of the media. It also plays a role in awareness creation among the masses as well as find ways for conflict resolution. The study concluded that a media strategy established between researcher, educator, journalist and peace worker to create an outstanding media space through journalism creativity (Aslam, 2015). According to Demarest & Langer (2018), media may play a role in peace keeping and especially in those cases where the conflict exists across religious and ethnic lines. Their study in the context of Nigeria indicated that reporting from conflict in Nigeria may have a role in peace journalism, and there is willingness among the journalists in Nigeria to avoid the escalatory language. However, the scarcity of resources and capacities hinder the in-depth analysis of the driver of conflict.

The empirical findings reported the paragraph above clearly shows that in addition to the influences theorized in Hierarchy of Influences, which play an important role in influencing news reporting by the journalists from the conflict zones. We therefore, theorize that there is a positive association between news reporting from the conflict zone in the journalists' level of patriotism. We further assume that news reporting from the conflict zones are influenced by the type of media organization. It is also theorized that the news reporting from the conflict zones have a positive association with elite political influence. The literature further shows an evidence that news



reporting from the conflict zones and journalists' national interests are closely linked. It is also assumed that national security and news in the conflict zones are associated.

In a study Creech (2017) indicated that journalistic work has increasingly risky especially in conflict zones. The study further highlighted that unequal distribution of risk to a non-western local reporter and freelancer, it allows media organization to capture profit from one of the individuals at the same time. The paper established such strategies that push political, economic and cultural value beyond war and conflict areas which mitigating report protection regardless by whom to create the report. Such media reports in conflict areas for journalist are a major cost of witnessing to bear it.

For local journalist the perceived threats include extra-judicial killings and impunity for perpetrators committing crimes against journalists perpetuate. While for the non-local journalist kidnapping for ransom is among the greatest threats perceived by non-local journalists. In addition to the perceived risk and dangers in the war and conflict zones, there are other impact and influences which have a close association with reporting from the conflict zones.

3. Methodology

The hierarchy of influence model is used selecting the population of the journalists in the conflict zones of Pakistan. The entire population of the journalists who have been involved in reporting from the conflict zones constitute the universe of the study. A total of 29 conflict zones are identified in the country where 3492 journalists are registered with the selected conflict zones' press clubs. The nature of conflict in these areas are ranging from religious (Swat, Dir Upper, Dir Lower, Buner, Peshawar, Bajaur, Waziristan (N), Waziristan (S), Mohmand and Orakzai) to Sectarian (Gilgit), while in some areas, the nature of conflict is mix of Sectarrians & Religious (Kurram), Ethnic & Religious (Baluchistan) and ethnic, sectarian & religions (Karachi). The total number of journalists living in the 29 zones that were chosen amounts to 3398 people. Using the aforementioned calculation, we can determine that the sample size is 358, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. In order to choose representative samples from each combat zone, we utilized the following formula:

$$n_i = n \cdot N_i / N$$

Where, n = Total Sample size, n_i = Sample Size to be selected from each conflict zone, N is the number of journalists in 14 conflict zones and N_i = Total number of journalists in each conflict zone.

4. Results and Discussion

Next, we present the sample respondents' response to different individual level of influences that affect conflict reporting. The respondents were asked on a scale of 1 to 5 whereas, 1 means they are strongly agreed with the notion, 2 means agreed, 3 means neutral, 4 means disagreed, and 5 means strongly disagreed (means not influential at all).



Table 1: Sample Respondents' Perceptions about Individual Level Influences in conflict Reporting

Category of influence	Perceived degree of influence					Agreement
	Strongly	Ag	Neut	Disag	Strong Disag	
Personnel background of the journalist	10	1	43	51	50	0.23
Professional background of the journalist	87	11	36	56	59	0.17
Educational level of the journalist	10	11	25	61	51	0.22
Training of the journalist	91	14	34	54	35	0.28
Experience of the journalist	10	11	26	61	45	0.25
Gender of the Journalist	93	11	31	43	67	0.19
Ethnicity of the Journalist	89	14	47	61	20	0.30
Religious sect of the journalist	97	11	38	72	23	0.28

Source: Authors own Calculation

The results showed that individual level influences are important for conflict reporting. It is evident that Personnel background of the journalist have a considerable influence on conflict reporting. (214 out of 358 (i.e., 59.77%)). Moreover, Professional background of the journalist has a considerable influence on conflict reporting (207 out of 358). Moreover, majority of the sample journalists are either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "Educational level of the journalist has a considerable influence on conflict reporting" (221 out of 358). Majority of the sample journalists are either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "Training of the journalist have a considerable influence on conflict reporting". A total of 226 are either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "Experience of the journalism have a considerable influence on conflict reporting." Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "Female Journalists are more vulnerable to threats than men" (217 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "Personnel background of the journalist have a considerable influence on conflict reporting" (230 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "Religious sect of the journalist influences the journalist work in the conflict zone" (235 out of 358 sample journalists). Hence, we observe significant differences in respondents' perception about various items of individual level of influences.



Table 2: Results of Chi Square Test

Items	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Personnel background of the journalist	67.17 ^a	0.00
Professional background of the journalist	43.04 ^a	0.00
Educational level of the journalist	75.91 ^a	0.00
Training of the journalist	80.13 ^a	0.00
Experience of the journalism	75.16 ^a	0.00
Gender of the Journalists	51.96 ^b	0.00
Ethnicity of the Journalist	98.34 ^b	0.00
Religious sect of the journalist	81.83 ^b	0.00

Source: Authors own Calculation. a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 50.0.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to examine the variation in journalists' perceptions with respect to the influences on reporting from the conflict zones across different provinces. The present study aims to bring new insights on power of various influences as proposed by previous studies and theories and examine the perceptions of the journalists across conflict zones in Pakistan.

Concerning the influence of religion on conflict reporting, the participants expressed that the religion influence the conflict reporting of the journalists. In this regard, the respondents viewed that the religion influenced journalists' work to a great extent as the militants use the religious card emotionally. The participants expressed that if the journalists try to cover a story that goes against them, the blame is put on the concerned journalists as to be anti-religion and anti-Islam because the militants consider themselves to be the true upholders of the religion. Hence, the respondents termed this scenario as confusing working environment for journalists who feel themselves insecure in such circumstances that, of course, affected their professional duties. Some of the conflict reporters viewed that though religious ideology has tremendous impact on conflict reporting, however it can be minimized by establishing the fact that journalists are not taking side of any party involved in conflict. The views expressed by the respondents concerning the role and influence of the religious parties showed that religious parties are also one of the major factors that not only determine the news values during conflict but also put their influence over reporting process. The participants, mostly, viewed that religious parties or groups have their impact on conflict reporting, however its nature may be changing with changing political scenario around the conflict. Some of the respondents argued that religious parties are avoiding their direct involvement in armed conflict, hence their influence is seemingly indirect rather than direct and powerful influence over conflict reporting. The respondents further viewed that it is too difficult to write against any religious group or party, especially at the time of conflict as reporting against such group simply means that the reporter be harassed by that particular religious group.



This study *has implications for* journalists. Such studies can be very supportive for validation of diverse theoretical preposition of the influences of various level of hierarchy model with relevance to conflict area media coverage and reporting by adding more valuable insights into exiting literature. Journalist working in conflict zones must have some of the necessary qualities, might be inherent parts of a journalist's personality; others, gained through experience and discipline.



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