



JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF EXTRA MEDIA LEVEL OF INFLUENCES ON CONFLICT REPORTING

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Abstract

This study examines the journalists' perceptions about the impact of extra media level of influences on conflict reporting. The findings of the study add to the existing body of knowledge on the relative importance of various levels of influences of HOIM and identify new influences affecting conflict reporting. Using the appropriate statistical methods, the sample size is determined based on the size of the total population that is being studied. For the purpose of selecting the number of journalists, a technique known as SRS is utilized. Samples selected from the 29 conflict zones in Pakistan. The study samples were based on areas where religious conflicts have been the phenomena happening in areas such as erstwhile FATA, Malakand Division, and the provincial Capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We find that editorial policies of media organizations themselves effect the process of conflict reporting. The results showed that extra media level influences are perceived with different degree of agreement by the sampled respondents. Moreover, for all items, we observe significant differences in respondents' perception about various items of extra media level of influences.

1. Introduction

Peace journalism is an important and growing field of journalism that seeks to promote peace, reduce violence and conflict, and advance social justice. It offers a powerful tool for shaping public



opinion, influencing decision-makers, and fostering social change. By highlighting positive developments and promoting alternative perspectives, peace journalism can help to build bridges and create greater understanding between people of different backgrounds and beliefs. Ultimately, peace journalism is a critical component of a larger effort to build a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.

The conflict, itself is very hard thing to cover but in case of conflict reporting, it is harder to report conflicting issues in media, either in print media or in electronic or online media. While reporting any conflict for media, it seems awkward to narrate whole story as it is. Journalist affects the news content along other social institutions and forces. So, conflict journalism needs to be evaluated within variable analytic framework where dependent variable (news content) always gets affected by multiple independent variables. Various models cannot capture all of the complex interrelationships involved in the Conflict Journalism. Models, by definition, are meant to explain variables by simplification, highlighting, suggesting, and organization. But such models cannot help out in finding effect of one variable to another. So, there is always feel to have new model or revised model which at least guide to check effect of one variable over other variables belong to that model. In conflict Journalism, the conflict reporting is the reporting done in conflict area so location to location the extent and intensity of conflict changes. It is more difficult task to evaluate multiple dimensions of conflict reporting under one pre-selected model. In developing countries like Pakistan, where the freedom of press is always questionable and life of working journalist is always at the stake, the framing of any particular conflict reporting on theoretical basis, is nearly out of the question.

There are many factors, external & internal, long term and short terms, seen & unseen, which affect journalists and their journalist tasks. In this globalized era, every nation tends to achieve that goal of developing sustainable and high-quality news media. The goal has been to encourage journalists to meet generally accepted international standards for professional journalism that supports transparent, democratic, non-corrupt government, and economic and civil development. However, journalists, news organizations and media houses are getting dominant in terms of information provision and breaking news phenomenon, which is very challenging by the rise of the internet and social media. Now factors like globalized media trends are getting more influential factors for working journalists so news organizations & media houses are operating across more platforms by engaging journalists with global audiences in more interactive ways as compare to past (Gade & Raviola, 2009).

Another major factor, according to some studies, is political pressure. While covering mega scandals, journalists have to work hard to pursue political dignities however many political leaders belong to developing even more advanced and developed countries, seek to secure themselves by taming the press/media. Many societies employ state-run news organizations to promote the propaganda critical to maintaining an existing political power base. It involves suppression like brutalities, police violence and hostility by intelligence agencies. These state-run mouthpieces take



significant attempts against media or individual journalists to mold their working norm by getting approved "government line" on contentious issues. In some cases, established autocratic governments continue to tighten the screws on dissenting voices of prominent journalists. In Asian countries, such "tightness of media" is very common which leads to breach in media dominance over public opinion. Political leaders always feel threatens to expose official wrongdoing or debunk official narratives. These developments alter the conditions of the legacy journalism profession (Deuze, 2005).

This study examines the journalists' perceptions about the impact of extra media level of influences on conflict reporting. The findings of the study add to the existing body of knowledge on the relative importance of various levels of influences of HOIM and identify new influences affecting conflict reporting.

2. Literature Review

The role of the media organizations and their influence is evident from the literature and according to the Hierarchy of Influence Model, journalists reporting is influenced by a number of levels of influences and media organization is one important influence. Hoiby (2019) stated that media organizations have specific role in conflict reporting. According to the author, it is especially in situation when journalists face threats of kidnapping and when similar crimes are committed against journalist in the conflict zone. The news contents are influenced by entities who have their own policies and economic imperatives (Reese, 2016; 2019). Therefore, any risk faced by the journalist be owned by the media organizations.

At this level, the social institutional affects journalist and media content. Basically, at the extra-media level, other social stakeholders can influence media by accelerating or de-accelerating prevailing trends. They can originate primarily from outside the media organizations. This perspective considers that the power to shape/reshape media content is not the media alone. It is sort of shared responsibility of government, advertisers, public relations, pressure groups, influential news sources, interest groups, and even other media organizations.

The role of government is quite obvious but the most influencing factor is rival media organizations which create a form of competitive market pressures. From a critical perspective, the extra-media level draws attention to the way media are subordinated to elite interests of ruling political party and rival media houses. While individually, journalists may scrupulously avoid conflicts of interest with rival media entities by showing unbiasedness in field reporting. They try hard to maintain a professional distance from journalists from rival media houses however, it is very natural to be intimately linked to larger corporate interests through interlocking boards of directors and other elite connections.

Moreover, it is a common practice that journalist belong to one media group must maintain structured relationships with other institutions, which surely affect journalist process and reshaping



media content. It is also part of practice that these relationships can be coercive and bit intimidating but more often, these ties get intentional and collusive. Normative concerns at this level ensures press autonomy and media freedom by assuming often that it is not desirable for the media to be so dependent on other social institutions.

In a study Bartholomé et.al (2015) explored that journalists have an active role in conflict frame building and this role is facilitated by media routine that are embedded in organizational practices. The findings of Relly & Bustamante (2014) showed that the journalists' practice was influenced by organizational-level influences, including newsroom policies and financial arrangements with government and business. Rawan & Hussain (2017) revealed that in addition to the media organization, conflict area reporting is also influenced by factors such as ethno political affiliation of the journalists. Similarly, strong influence of certain political group on media houses and the active censorship by media practitioners that change the conflict reporting to war journalism. The findings also indicated that in Pakistan's Karachi city the conflict reporting is strongly influenced by certain ethnic groups such as the *Muttahida Qaumi Movement* (MQM). There has been an evidence that lack of democratic system, high level of violence, economic inequalities, severe threats to human rights and internal conflict are some of the social indicators that creates threats to the journalist lives and outcomes of the news reporting (Brambila, 2017).

Jan & Hussain (2020) identified the factors affecting media reporting in Pakistan. Their findings revealed that reporting from the conflict areas are influenced by factors such as patriotism and economic incentives accruing to the media organizations. These include among others advertisements, because media is dependent on advertisement. The findings further indicated that journalists are threatened by certain ethnic groups such as *Muttahida Qaumi Movement* (MQM) in a situation when institutional mechanisms are weak and the media is subdued such as in case of Karachi conflict.

Ola (2020) indicated that political motives during the elections leads to electoral violence on the journalists. In certain African states election characterized in various African States based on uncertainty, disappearance of journalist, violence and killing. While Bustamante & Relly (2016) have shown that journalists' lives are threatened by violent environment such as that prevails in Mexico, which has led to the death of journalist on mass scale. Relly & Bustamante (2014) also showed that there are individual influences such as handling the violence, lack of training in conflict reporting and safety concern, which has a strongest pressure on media reporters. Eti (2009) explored that the organizational level influence, news room policies, and journalistic practices influence conflict reporting. Media have also been shown to have a role in conflict management to the society as it is the voice of the people.

The conflict reporting has been shown to be influenced by factors including an emerging public agenda. Hussain & Rehman (2015) argued that conflict reporting is influenced by the degree of ignoring the issue in public agenda and the reaction of people to it. The news in such cases is likely



to be pro-people. The author found that news reporting about the province of Baluchistan is an evident case of this scenario. Similarly factors such as economic and political influences also have been shown to influence news reporting from the conflict zones (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011).

There is also greater role of the political parties and other interest groups involvement in creating risk to the journalists. Such type of threats and conflict causes the news reports to other directions (Neupane & Zeng, 2014). According to Hanitzsch & Mellado (2011), there has been a growing interest among researchers in the field of mass communication to identify factors of conflict reporting. Hanitzsch and Mellado's study may examine the ways in which political pressure and economic incentives can shape conflict reporting, while Tumber's study may explore the impact of conflict exposure on the psychological well-being of journalists. By delving into these arguments in greater detail, the author could better understand the ways in which these factors interact and shape journalists' work. Additionally, exploring these arguments in greater detail could also help to shed light on the challenges facing journalists in conflict zones, and inform the development of strategies to support them. For example, understanding the ways in which political pressure and economic incentives can shape conflict reporting could help to create an environment that supports independent and accurate reporting, while understanding the impact of conflict exposure on journalists' mental health could help to support their well-being. In conclusion, incorporating a more detailed exploration of the arguments made by Hanitzsch and Mellado and Tumber would greatly strengthen the author's thesis and provide a more in-depth understanding of the complex factors that shape conflict reporting. In a study Relly and Bustamante (2014) indicated that the strongest influences on conflict reporting arise from outside newsrooms. The forthcoming section focuses on the link between the news reporting from the conflict zones and journalist psychological well-being.

To sum up, the various domain of influences on news reporting has been intensively discussed in the literature (Hussain, 2019; Musa and Yushau, 2013; Crawford & Davies, 2014; Smith & Higgins, 2012; Orgeret, 2015; Hoiby, 2019; Reese, 2019; Jan & Hussain, 2020; Ola, 2020; Ashraf & Brooten, 2017 and Jamil, 2017). In the literature, the gender aspect of journalism has also been analyzed by Orgeret (2015). In conflict zone female journalists, face more safety challenges. Moreover, exploring the significance of the gender; the study argue that conflict reporting is likely to be covered more professionally if groups of journalists covering the conflict are heterogeneous. Further, the role of the media organizations and their influence is evident from the literature and according to the Hierarchy of Influence Model, journalists reporting is influenced by a number of levels of influences and media organization is one important influence (Hoiby, 2019 and Reese, 2019; Bartholomé et.al., 2015; Relly & Bustamante, 2014) . Jan & Hussain (2020) identified the factors affecting media reporting in Pakistan. Their findings revealed that reporting from the conflict areas are influenced by factors such as patriotism and economic incentives accruing to the media organizations. These include among others advertisements, because media is dependent on advertisement. The conflict reporting has also been shown to have various impacts on journalists' well-being. These among others, include psychological and emotional impacts (Feinstein, et. al.,



2015; Ashraf & Brooten, 2017; Jamil, 2017). There has been a growing literature which show the links between journalists reporting and globalization (Cottle, 2009; Barbieri, & Reuveny, 2005; Allan, & Zelizer, 2004).

The literature review showed that influence of various level of hierarchy model affects differently over journalists working in different area at different places but it does not make it clear that what type of combination of levels or one level only, relates to each other while affecting these working journalists. This in-depth literature review also does guide that how conflict areas media reporting, as external and a significant variable can increase/decrease the influence of various level of hierarchy model especially in third world country like Pakistan.

Although there are multiple research studies, conducted over evaluating perceptions of working journalists in order to examine various level of influences, but such perception-based studies are missing which not only evaluate theoretical aspects of influence of various level of hierarchy model but caters it practical implications as well. Therefore, for context of a third world country like Pakistan, this research study aims to explore different aspects of influence of various level of hierarchy model theoretically and practically. 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.

3. Methods and Techniques

Using the appropriate statistical methods, the sample size is determined based on the size of the total population that is being studied. For the purpose of selecting the number of journalists, a technique known as SRS is utilized.

Samples selected from the 29 conflict zones in Pakistan. The study samples were based on areas where religious conflicts have been the phenomena happening in areas such as erstwhile FATA, Malakand Division, and the provincial Capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

4. Results, Findings and Analysis

This section provides the detailed results of the present study and underlying discussion. The results obtained from analysis of the journalists' perceptions involved in reporting from the conflict zones to assess relative significance of different levels of influences. The next section presents the sample respondents' response to different extra media 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 particular 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 the Extra Media Level of Influence in conflict Reporting

Statement	Strongly	Ag	Neut	Disag	Stron disag	Agreement
Government intervention	82	10	33	83	52	0.12
Financial pressures	74	11	27	76	52	0.14
Threats from various gro	87	11	32	63	59	0.15
The military pressures	99	11	27	45	56	0.24
high risk of life in inves and reporting on cases re Security agencies	10	14	27	54	35	0.31
The Security agencies b sole provider of informat	12	11	25	58	29	0.35
The society's percepti attitude towards militanc	92	11	25	62	26	0.31
The fear of being called Taliban	72	10	16	56	51	0.21
Being a resident of confl	112	11	10	54	51	0.28
The military pressure	117	11	11	65	33	0.33
The militants' supporters	129	11	22	43	11	0.48
The militants 'pressures	140	11	15	44	22	0.47
Audience preferences	152	14	21	24	19	0.54
The economic gains	118	14	21	45	26	0.40
No access to the incident	116	14	22	52	24	0.39
No access to freed information	132	10	26	67	27	0.35
The fear of threats and ki	10	11	17	34	26	0.41

Source: Authors own Calculation

The results showed that extra media level influences are perceived with different degree of agreement by the sampled respondents. It is evident that majority of the sampled journalist 190 out of 358 (53.07 %) are strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “your work is influenced by the Government intervention while covering the conflict”. Majority of the sample journalists are strongly agreed and agreed with the statement that “*Your work is influenced by the financial pressure while covering the conflict*”. Moreover, majority of the sample journalists are either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “*threats from various groups influence your reporting*”. Majority of the sample journalists are either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “*the military pressures affect the quality reporting of this conflict in some meaningful way*”. A total of 101 and 141 are either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “*There is high risk of life in investigating and reporting on cases related to Security agencies.*”



Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*The Security agencies being the sole provider of information are compromising on quality reporting*” (246 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*The society’s perception and attitude towards militancy affect quality reporting*” (245 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*The fear of being called as pro-Taliban affect quality reporting*” (235 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*Being a resident of conflict zone affects quality reporting*” (243 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*The military pressure restrict you to get information in conflict reporting*” (249 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*The militants’ supporters threaten journalists while reporting from the conflict*” (282 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*The militants put pressures on journalists for publishing/broadcasting their opinion*” (277 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*The reporting from the conflict zone is influenced by audience preferences*” (294 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*The economic gains influence quality of conflict reporting*” (266 out of 358 sample journalists). Most of the journalists are either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “*No access to the incident place influence conflict reporting*” (258 out of 358 sample journalists). These findings support the theoretical background of the hierarchy of influence Model in which Reese (2001) assumed that the media operate in structured relationships with other institutions that function to shape media content.

Table 2 presents the results of Chi-Square test. For all items, we observe significant differences in respondents’ perception about various items of extra media level of influences.



Table 2: Results of Chi-Square test

Questions/statement/Items	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig
Government intervention	32.74 ^a	0.00
Financial pressures	38.14 ^a	0.00
Threats from various groups	41.91 ^a	0.00
The military pressures	71.15 ^a	0.00
High risk of life in investigating and reporting related to Security agencies	82.16 ^a	0.00
The Security agencies being the sole provider of information	87.14 ^a	0.00
The society's perception and attitude towards media	64.91 ^a	0.317
The fear of being called as pro-Taliban	55.81 ^a	0.00
Being a resident of conflict zone	75.31 ^a	0.00
The military pressure	83.52 ^a	0.00
The militants' supporters	115.11 ^a	0.00
The militants' pressures	110.29 ^a	0.00
Audience preferences	128.17	0.00
The economic gains	96.25 ^a	0.00
No access to the incident place	94.17 ^a	0.00
No access to freedom of information	86.31 ^a	0.00
The fear of threats and killing	102.31 ^a	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. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This study examines the journalists' perceptions about the impact of extra media level of influences on conflict reporting. The findings of the study add to the existing body of knowledge on the relative importance of various levels of influences of HOIM and identify new influences affecting conflict reporting. We find that editorial policies of media organizations themselves effect the process of conflict reporting. In this aspect of conflict reporting, editorial policy of media organizations has a substantial effect on conflict reporting. They argued that any news, which is accurate and in the best interest of audience, can be filtered if it is not in line with the policy of concerned media outlet, which is unfortunate practice. Another aspect of this issue is very severe for conflict reporters as many of the respondents believed that sometimes a single statement of reporter, which is against the policy of organization, simply means losing of job. However, some respondents termed editorial policies are essential tool that help journalists to perform their duties more professionally. The respondents having this opinion said that strict editorial guidelines are good if they are based on ethical journalism as following strict guidelines a journalist do not get detract of their jobs rather would help journalists to work in safe and secure environment. However, they [respondents] argued that sometimes the fluctuated nature of editorial policies of media



organizations adversely affects the reporting process, whereas need of making policies well-defined and workable to promote ethical based journalism, especially at the time of conflict.

Apart from all the identified problems, journalism is considered as an important field that contributes its role in restoration of peace, calling it scholarly 'Peace Journalism'. In this context most of the participants of the study argued that journalists are not peace advocates. However, if they could play their professional role efficiently then they can contribute their due input in eradication of terrorism. However, expressing a different perspective, some of the participants argued that Pakistan is not a safe country for journalists, journalists are unable to play a role in restoration of peace. In another words, journalists are not capable to play their role in eliminating terrorism. The moderate opinion that came during discussion is that media may have its influence to change the minds of people and turn them from negative to positive through balanced, objective and responsible reporting and hence the media may play its role, indirectly, in peace building through its ethical coverage. It is further concluded that conflict reporting is influenced by a multitude of factors and it is a challenging task for the conflict reporters. Future studies should focus to identify the remedies to minimize the multitude of influences and enhance a balanced and transparent conflict reporting from the conflict zones.

Further, this study suggests that media should enhance its integrity and credibility. Through fairness, unbiasedness and investigative reporting of any issue, the media can enhance its integrity and credibility. It can be achieved by reporting black as black and white as white. Certainly, media can enhance its prestige in presence of a lot of new media platforms. For this, the traditional media should take care of ethics, professional norms and ensure their implication.



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