



Economic Recession in the Media Industry and Survival of the KPK'S Journalists



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Abstract: *Media was hit by the economic recession of 2018-19, and hundreds of media workers lost their jobs, but at the same time, many journalists survived. This study is focused on how the journalists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) survived during this media crisis and how they equipped themselves to face the challenges faced by them. Their approach towards the recession was positive, and they also accepted the challenges to enhance their capacity to fulfil the requirements of their respective organizations. The study at hand is qualitative in nature, wherein the researcher employed the technique of in-depth interviews. Twenty journalists among those who have survived during the economic recession, with a minimum 5 years of experience in the field from Khyber Union of Journalists and Peshawar Press Club, were interviewed. The results show that recession made the journalists ponder on polishing their other skills by enhancing their capacity to produce diversified content to sustain their jobs in the field.*

Key Words: Economic Recession, Journalists' Survival, Diversified Content, Capacity Enhancement, Technical Skills

Introduction

The Media Industry of Pakistan has faced a recession, and thousands of media workers across the country were fired during 2018-19.

Media houses needed advertisements to run, and in Pakistan, the largest media advertiser is the federal government which cut down the

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share of advertisement during 2018-19, which results in the recession. [Adnan Rehmat in 2019](#) mentioned in his article for Aurora Magazine of DAWN newspaper with the title “Why is Pakistan’s media in crisis?” that: “In 2016-17 federal media advertisement was worth 87.7 billion which was decreased and in 2017-18 it was worth 81.6 billion, in 2018-19 the market was shrined more and it came down to 67.15 billion. A comparison of the last two years shows that television advertisement has been reduced by 10 billion, print advertisement reduced by 6 billion, while radio advertisement decreased by 0.75 billion.

According to the annual report of Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority (PEMRA), there are 88 TV channels (News and Entertainment) working in the country, while 48 more licenses are also issued and make the tally to 136. An increase in numbers also means a shrink in the profit, and that also makes media outlets started firing the staff, especially those who were heavily paid and had the single-tasking ability. Each media outlet was looking for those media workers who can give them some kind of extra utility so that they can get all their work done from just a few workers only. In this war of proving oneself unique and enough, many journalists opt to become all-rounder, which might have affected their work in the broader picture, but it helped them to retain their jobs. Staying in the field is the only way out, and if a Journalist has to stay on the job, he/she has to do more than what others were actually doing. Skilled journalists are facing issues to showcase their talent with a secure future. Technological advancement has even marginalized and limited employment alternatives for skilled working professionals ([Gumuş, 2016](#)).

Digital journalism is in practice perceived by the public in this vein to be seen ([Witschge, Anderson, Domingo & Hermida, 2016](#)). The rise of media technology has changed everything, especially the time frame within which media operates. It has changed operations, revenues, and consumers, which are known as the audience. The journalists are adopting technology to work more efficiently for production processes through the convergence of media. There has been a noticeable change in the content of the journalists, organizational structure, facilities and consumption at the audience level. These changes have certainly transformed journalism. It has made numerous platforms as an alternative which are tabloids, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Facebook, own websites and mobile phone applications, etc. The important aspect of the new face of journalism in today’s time speaks of a journalist being an absolute multi-skilled worker ([Khan A, 2019](#)).

This media recession has encouraged hundreds of journalists to run their own YouTube channel, which not only helped them to earn quite good and their dependency on the media outlets has also reduced. During the recession, many journalists have lost their jobs, but it has made them learn how to pass through such situations by thinking out of the box and realizing their other abilities. This study is an attempt to dig out how the journalist from KPK managed to survive during the economic recession in media during 2018-19.

In recent years in Pakistan media industry has faced a recession problem, and thousands of media workers across the country were fired. But there are several journalists, who survived due to their all-rounder skills like flexibility

and adopting nature for new media technologies. It is observed that recession caused media entrepreneurship raised as an opportunity for journalists where they can earn money and sustain themselves in the market. As a media organization, one needs a huge amount to start a newspaper, Television or Radio setup but media entrepreneurship needs very low capital to start a YouTube channel, Facebook page or even a website. Media entrepreneurship is not only providing an alternative source of income but also plays a crucial role for economics as prevention of the expansion at a general level. The strength is exactly in the weak point of media large companies (Khajeheian & Arbatani, 2011).

In far-flung areas, these social media platforms are the fastest and easiest way to share news items and keep your YouTube; Facebook pages active. Similarly, sometimes this medium is used to facilitate their peer group (Hashmi & Zulqarnain, 2020). The global recession has made things even more worsen. However, the predicament of the media industry can be only partly explained by technological and economic factors. Financial survival is dependent on income diversification (Radcliffe & Ali, 2017). The employment rate has also increased as social media journalism has led to the emergence of several new job types, positions and earning opportunities in an entirely new virtual sector (Babacan, Eraslan, & Temizer, 2020).

Sooner or later, online freelancing will become the best-adapted techniques all around the world. Pakistan is ranked as the 4th largest country in terms of freelancing, and it is increasing at a very fast rate. Pakistan is 4th in ranking as compared to other developing countries such as India, which stands at the top

of the list because of economic factors (Masood, Naseem, Shamim, & Qureshi, 2018). Journalism can hardly be explored without the large number of journalists who are currently working as freelancers. Freelancing is not a new phenomenon, but in the field of journalism, it is now becoming a trustworthy way of earning money; several freelancers are growing as a share of all journalists as it has been witnessed that media organizations are losing audiences, trimming workforces, and outsourcing labor in the context of the digital revolution. The growth of freelance journalists also comes among a larger, postindustrial desire for flexibility in staffing. Yet, there is all manner of so-called freelance journalists, and they are not easily located or defined (Massey & Elmore, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The researchers have used the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory analysis and augmented, conceptualizes journalism as a network attributing agency that connects all the actors to form a network. Theory focusing on power relations, order and hierarchies is used to illustrate how the news production network initiates the way which has been developed by the technologies. ANT also focuses on how traditionally powerful agents start negotiating and shape themselves for the current scenario.

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is rooted in science and technology studies. It has been developed in the 1980s by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. Dankert, (2015) ANT deals with human and nonhuman entities, which are gadgets. It focuses on the

connection that has been established between nonhuman and human. This theory tells us how this connection leads us to form another network within the network to survive in the technological world. ANT is a theoretical and methodological approach to social theory where everything in the social and natural worlds exists in constantly shifting networks of relationships. Journalism is defined as 'the act of a citizen, or group of citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information.

Keeping in view the nature and requirement of this study, qualitative research was adopted to explore and examine recession in Pakistani media as a positive contributor/catalyst in enhancement and diversifying professional skills, ability and capacity building of journalists. Furthermore, to investigate;

- How did the recession in Pakistani media develop journalist's professional skills?
- How did the recession encourage the journalists to build their capacity in Pakistani media?

Research Methodology

Data Collection

Keeping in view the nature and requirement of this study, qualitative research was adopted to explore and examine recession in Pakistani media as a positive contributor/catalyst in enhancement and diversifying professional skills, ability and capacity building of journalists. Husserl's phenomenological approach was used to investigate the hypothesis. According to him, meaning lies in an

individual's experience, and when we collect the experiences of all participants, it can interpret a situation ([Moustakas, 1994](#)).

A semi-structured questionnaire majorly focusing on recession and the pressurized environment that recession created was designed. Techniques of in-depth interviews were used for the exploration of the study. Twenty journalists ([Dowrkin, 2012](#)) that included male and female journalists ([Sarantakos, 1998](#)) from Khyber Union of Journalists (KHUJ) and Peshawar Press Club was chosen through non-probability purposive sampling technique to acquire the desired information only. Participants were arranged in alphabetical order first from where every 21st participant was interviewed. The respondents have a minimum 5 years of experience that have survived the recession of 2018-2019 successfully.

The assumption was that how the journalists of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa survived through the recession when it comes to diversifying their skills and also adopting new technologies. Media organizations wanted their employees to do multitasking as well as develop content that is more diverse in terms of the target audience. Media outlets also expect that their employees will depend more on technology rather than workforce on the ground; one reporter can perform the duty of a cameraman, satellite engineer, non-linear editor and field producer if he/she is capable of using gadget as a tool for recording, editing and transmission of a news item.

In this study, the researcher explored that how journalists developed their technical skills and why they were encouraged to do so. The study also focused on the content that has been

produced by the journalists of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after the recession. The Actor-Network Theory helped us to analyze the new network of journalists, which has been created based on technical skills, diversified content and journalist's capacity.

The study focused on those journalists who proved themselves and successfully gone through a difficult phase, setting the bars for the new and upcoming young journalists in the field. The media industry was hit all across the country, but here focal point was Peshawar and specifically the members of Peshawar Press Club and Khyber Union of Journalists. Total members of Khyber Union of Journalists and Peshawar Press Club are 583, while those who lost their job during the recession 2018-19 are 161. The population of the study is 422 journalists who are still working in the field.

The non-probability sampling procedure is usually used for exploration and qualitative analysis. The purposive sampling technique, also known as judgmental sampling, is the technique in which subjects will be chosen purposively, who are relevant to the topic ([Sarantakos, 1998](#)). In this study, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was used. Those members of the Khyber Union of Journalists and Peshawar Press Club were interviewed who are in the field since 2015 and survived the recession 2018-19.

An extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommended guidance about the sample size and suggested that it should be from 5 to 50 participants as adequate for qualitative research ([Dowrkin, 2012](#)). So, in this study sample of twenty journalists are interviewed. For the

respondent, the systematic random sampling technique, the type of probability is sampling.

When the sampling fraction method (symbolized by k) is employed, samples are drawn from a sample frame based on the sampling fraction that is equal to N/n , where N is the number of units in the target population and n the number of units of the sample ([Sarantakos, 1998](#)). $k=N/n$

Alphabetically 422 journalists were arranged. Position location of each sample selected from the 422-target population is decided through the systematic sampling method where the sample size is 20. $k=422/20$ $k=21.1$ (approximately equal to 21st item/journalist was selected during the process). Keeping the ethical aspect in mind, the researchers have not published the names of the respondents as promised.

Interviews were recorded over a voice recorder through face to face communication. 20-25 minutes approximately were spent with each respondent in digging out fruitful information through open-ended questions. The interviews were then verbatim transcribed. Essential statements from participants' interviews were taken into account as their specific experiences. These statements were then joined to form themes and clusters to identify and extract meaning through discourse analysis techniques ([Jacobs and Tschötschel 2019](#)).

Data Analysis

Techniques of Discourse analysis are widely used in qualitative studies where this formal method helps in generating new ideas and information from the data collected under analysis that is beyond the range of other

techniques designed to analyze the obtained material ([Harris, 1981](#)). In mid-1990s, the techniques of discourse analysis were found spreading across and adapting rapidly, to sum up, the findings of the studies as it has been witnessed to encompass variety in terms of topics, conceptual approaches, boundaries, themes and methods ([Leipold, Feindt, Winkel, and Keller 2019](#)).

In this study, discourse analysis has been used to analyze the responses gathered from the journalists who survived the recession of 2018-2019. The interviews were transcribed and represented in the shape of clusters which were analyzed through discourse analysis technique to fetch the findings. The overall analysis came up regarding recession as an encouraging sign by the journalists that helped them to work in multiple dimensions.

Findings and Analysis

Journalists were cornered about their job security during the recession of 2018-2019, and they had to adopt new techniques for the sake of their survival in the field. Journalists were asked to complete those tasks that were beyond their capacity. Respondents, while sharing their experiences of that time, added that most of them were not even trained by their respective organizations, Press Club and Khyber Union of Journalists. NGOs and INGOs working for media workers were the real helping hand while colleagues, seniors and social circle also helped them to grow and learn additional skills. Few technically aware respondents also took help from online trainings and Youtube tutorials.

According to the respondents, they started working on their technical skills during the

recession 2018-19 and learned a huge amount of camera and editing skills during the said tough period through various ways. They also considered freelancing and started pitching story ideas on various platforms. Video journalists started working on knowing the art of report making, including audio beeper and reporting a story. Respondents added that technical skills were the major reason which helped them to save their jobs, whereas few of them also shared that they didn't learn to survive but to be equipped to fight unexpected difficult situations.

Using a mobile phone as a tool for journalism was becoming a regular practice, as shared by the respondents. Similarly, Mobile Journalism was introduced, and they learned its techniques to secure their jobs. Already equipped journalists with the technical advancement started enhancing and polishing their current skills. Moreover, they switched their focus towards operating cameras, editing machines and even drone cameras as well.

After 2018, fear was the constant factor among the journalists. This fear had a positive and negative role; our respondents shared the positive role of this fear, which pushed them to a position where they had no choice but to learn new skills for their betterment. Few of the respondents also shared that the fear of losing a job was not the major reason to learn, but they wanted to have an alternate source of income; consequently, if they get fired so they would have others skills to operate their own social media platform and to learn as well as grow from them.

Discussion

Time changes everything, and the field of

journalism is also evolving with the passage of time. Recession in 2018-19 plays an important role to expedite the process of change and development in the field of journalism. Currently, everything is not the same anymore when it comes to journalism, workforce and techniques of journalism as they are much different now as it was a decade ago where a dedicated team was to be deputed, and the event was covered with proper discipline. As journalism across the globe is evolving and now the situation is more dynamic and more challenging for the journalists. This study focuses the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the evolution of journalists due to recession 2018-19. The journalists were not fully equipped technically before the recession of the respective period, they were aware of basic technical skills, but that too was not up to the mark. Journalists were only supposed to file stories through a computer, and to some extent, they were aware of how the camera works too, but they were not in a position to use the camera or edit and make a report on their own.

When the situation was not the same any more than the competition began and everyone agreed that it was survival of the fittest. Journalists, irrespective of their age, organization and responsibilities, started to enhance their capacity, including learning new techniques that can help them to ensure their utility for the organizations. Almost every organization was in order to narrow down its staff at different stations, which creates healthy competition within the organization as well as in the field. Journalists started overviewing their past performances and capabilities and started learning new techniques to improve their skills by polishing what so ever they

already had inside. Reporters started taking an interest in camera and editing, while video journalists started taking an interest in reporting. The environment of competition also strengthened the bond among the journalists as they were in need of each other's skills to make themselves capable enough to survive the situation. Moreover, the recession not only encouraged the journalists to learn new skills but also made them revisit their current skills, which eventually helped them to ponder on their inbuilt capabilities.

When the situation was getting worse and initial signs of recession appeared in 2018, many of the journalists were not ready to accept the change. The change that totally re-emergence the field of journalism was acceptable for few minds, and those minds started molding themselves according to the need of the day. Learning is the key to success while learning during the recession was the key for the journalists, and those who kept learning to survive were successful. Journalists learning phase still continues, and as they are learning new things, which not only help them to evolve but also increase their utility for the organization. Capacity building and technical learning both continue side by side, which enable journalists to successfully pass through the difficult stages. The recession has brought the journalists in a state where they not only focused on how to survive but how to stay in the field was a real challenge too. They did not care about how they would learn the new tactics but only focused on that they have to learn any skill that helps them to survive and save their job. It was not only this fear which pushed them to learn, but a lot more worked together to enhance the capabilities. No doubt the major role was played by the fear factor,

and they started searching for an alternate source of income too.

By taking into consideration the findings, now this fear is a constant factor among the journalists where it is playing a positive and negative role. The positive role of this fear pushed them to a position where they had no choice but to learn new skills, few of the respondents also shared that the fear of losing the job was not the major reason to learn, but they wanted to have an alternate source of income. As the job was not secure, they saw many of the good journalists sent home on a single day; they started finding alternate ways to earn money which was the ultimate goal of that situation. Journalists across the province started their YouTube channel, Website and also Facebook pages in order to keep their voices raised among the masses. Similarly, if they get fired so they would have the skills to operate their own social media platform and to learn from them. Online media and online training sessions helped the respondents to learn the new techniques, while the non-governmental organizations arranged many training sessions to equip them technically and helped them to think differently.

Journalists having multi-dimensional talent also needed will power to survive. It is never easy to face a tough challenge and walk through successfully by setting an example for the upcoming generations. Recession 2018-2019 was also not easy to deal with; journalists having so much in their past was never measured; all that matter was the current situation. Organizations were ready to fire anyone who was not wealthy for them, while someone who was new but considered as multi-talented with multitasking abilities was

welcomed and retains with a lesser salary as compared to the experienced fellows.

Recession 2018-19 changed the scenario for journalism in Pakistan and especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Before 2018 the journalists were supposed to focus on their beats, and they have to be the master of their beat, but during the recession, the reduction of workforce vanishes the beat system in most of the organizations. Organizations are more interested in such workers who can perform more responsibilities with a single salary. Respondents sharing their pre and post-recession duties emphasize that their work is not the same anymore. Now they have to work more and bring quality as well while a single beat system is not in practice. According to the respondents, they were hired for a single task, but now they are performing multitasking; a cameraman is now a reporter, while a reporter is now a cameraman, copyeditor, video editor and even a transmitter. Journalists also shared that they are now not only focusing their mainstream media, but also their organization needs their work, time and energy for a social media site. As the workforce reduced, the events cannot be missed, so in the past, as one reporter was on average covering a couple of events is now covering many events a day. Similarly, they are also keeping an eye on social media sites, which are now a reliable source for information. Few respondents are now relaxed as their organization interest in the region reduced, but they do assign to fulfill the quality task.

In this research, The Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is used as a theoretical framework. This theory analysis and augmented, conceptualizes journalism as a network attributing agency that connects all

the actors to form a network. The technological skills that journalists adopted to stay in the field put them in another small network that lies within the journalism field. Currently, all the members of the Khyber Union of Journalists are known as journalists, but those who adopted new technology form another network that helps them to survive and help each other to stay in the field. Theory focusing on power relations, order and hierarchies is used to illustrate how the news production network initiates the way which has been developed by the technologies. Actor-Network Theory also focuses on how traditionally powerful agents start negotiating and shape themselves for the current scenario.

The journalists who form a network within the network are those who take the recession fear as the positive contributor towards the field of journalism. The new network has been formed due to the survival in the field, which is the reflection of the Actor-Network-Theory. The journalists are the actors who initiated to learn the new techniques, and after passing through the learning phase, they are the survivors who lead the path which is necessary for the new journalists who will join the field in the future. Survival in the field of journalism is simple as the journalist has to be on the job and to fulfil the basic requirements of the organization they work for. Those journalists who survived during the recession set the bar for the future, which needs to be reached if a journalist has to stay in the field. It is not necessary to feel that the findings of this research are the only way to survive, but the fact is that these findings have a major role when it comes to survival during a hard time, and similarly now these findings will help the field reporters to enhance their technical skills.

The recession put journalists in a position where they have learned so many things; while responding to the research question; they shared that using technical equipment was the real learning. They learned mobile journalism, editing on the computer and also on a mobile phone, making reports on mobile phone and transmitting them to the head office was also the new thing they learned during the recession, video journalists responded that they learned to report and to use drone camera while the art of asking a good and relevant question was also a skill they develop during this recession. Mobile is the gadget that journalists are frequently using for their official work; recession helped them to edit audio reports, pitch a story idea, typing Urdu font in mobile phone and also making tickers for television, vlogging, running social media pages and channels are all the skill they have learned during the recession of 2018-2019.

Conclusion

Recession is an economic term that refers to a decline in economic activity of the specific region or field; it brings unemployment but also created healthy competition, which results in quality work. This study focuses on those journalists of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who survived during the recession of 2018-19. Journalists had a tough time during the recession, most of the journalists had no help from their organization, press club and union, but they learned using the technology with the help of their seniors and colleagues, they started covering more beats to produce the diversified content while non-governmental organizations helped them to enhance their capacity. The study also revealed that these journalists are now working round the clock,

which does affect their social life, but in order to stay active and always available to the organizations, they sacrifice their personal space.

This study successfully came up with influential insights from the journalists that economic recession did help them positively in which they actually figured out their utility at its best and started working in different streams. In this study, the content was discussed, and the journalists shared that their seniors helped them to generate diversified content, which increased their utility within the organization. This study shows that now journalists are doing multitasking and performing one-man show while in the past they had a team which covers the whole event. The study also pointed out that the learning process for the journalist is now continuing, and they have to learn with each passing day, there is no endpoint to technology, and similarly, there is no endpoint to their learning.

The study shows that the current media field is totally changed as compared to the pre-recession 2018-19. The new era demands more from the journalists and they are trying their best to fulfil the need of their organization, they are not only doing the conferential reporting, but also they are focusing on the unique content which stands out. The study shows that the medium of the media is no more a barrier; journalists are now working across the mediums and reporting for newspapers, television and social media sites too. The rise of digital media also increased their burden, but they used it as an opportunity to enhance their utility for their organization.

Recommendations

The study pointed out the positive sides of the media recession from 2018-2019 successfully. One of the major positive outcomes from the recession of 2018-2019 is that it has set the standards for the upcoming journalists that are required to be maintained in order to enter the field and sustain their jobs then. The new media practitioners and the future journalists have to adopt all the changes that the recession has brought so far during the time period of 2018-2019. The concept of the one-man show should have been made viral across the country, and those who want to join the field to become an influential part of society should have to focus on individual capacity and capability building. The old school of thoughts like beat reporting for journalism as a field and profession are no more seen in any case nowadays because one has to be specialized in various dimensions to come under the limelight. Journalists have to adopt the new technology and increase their utility for the organization for the sake of their demand as professionals in office as well in the field.

Similarly, as digital media is the future, digital medium and especially mobile journalism is going to be a key factor behind job sustainability as it will be the need of time. Journalists have to learn how to use their mobile phones for reporting on the spot, editing on it, merging the visuals, adding on the texts, including the graphics and uploading the stuff through the same mobile phone to reach the desired standards. Journalists have to ponder on their multiple skills and multitasking abilities to become freelancers and entrepreneurs in order to use digital media platforms as an alternate source of income.

The world is evolving at a rapid pace, and journalists with multitasking abilities are the need in the future in order to fulfill the organization's demands. Moreover, the education institutes such as universities are required to redesign their curriculum and develop course content that is more suitable to the current challenges of the media industry that includes not only economic pressures but

professional challenges too. Aspiring journalists should be trained at the initial stages in order to deal with the newly made changes and benchmark challenges at their best. Upcoming journalists should consider their even minimum skills that can be polished easily just to make sure that they can work in different dimensions of the same field.

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