

Socio-Psychological Effects on Media Professional Standards during Military Operations in Pakistan

Rooh ul Amin Khan

PhD Scholar, Centre of Media and Communication Studies,
University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

Zahid Yousaf

Associate Professor, Centre for Media and Communication Studies,
University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: zahid.yousaf@uog.edu.pk

Abstract

While using qualitative and quantitative techniques, this study analyzes the issues and challenges faced by the journalists while working in the areas going under military operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and FATA. Based on the hierarchy of influences model, a survey was conducted in Waziristan, Swat and Peshawar. A total of 185 local journalists from Swat, North Waziristan and Peshawar are selected and interviewed. The research found various psychological and visible impacts on journalists reporting from conflict areas. They face challenges like governmental and organizational pressure, safety hazards and bars on freedom of access to news sources. Low perks and privileges, facilities to perform their professional duties and demanding standards for local journalists. The war journalists were dissatisfied with their professions and many were thinking to quit their jobs. In the qualitative technique of semi-structured interviews, the survey findings were supported and integrated with the large issues of media control and geo-strategic considerations.

Key Words

War on Terror, Role of Media, Psychological Pressures, Responsible Reporting, Safety of Journalists

Introduction

The existing scholarship on the war-media relationship reveals that media escalate conflicts for nationalistic and professional reasons (Ross, 2007). On the other hand extended reporting of the conflict helps the warring parties to propagate their desired aims. This aspect of the media-war relationship is characterized as symbiotic (Iqbal, 2015). Although the renowned conflict journalism researcher Daniel Hallin (2004) believes this nexus has not yet been completely theorized, excellent commentaries are available on the media's role in World and Cold War era, US intervention in Vietnam and Latin America, Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan (Herman & Chomsky, 2010; Lynch, 2006) to mention a few episodes. The relationship may have been generally explored, however, "the problem does not lie in why the media covers [sic] terrorism but lies in how the media covers [sic] terrorism (original emphasis)" (Iqbal, 2015).

Alongside this general interest in the war-media nexus, there is a growing body of literature that discuss the issues and problems that journalists face while reporting on the conflicts in Pakistan and elsewhere (Hussain, 2016 & 2017; Lynch, 2006; Blasi, 2004; Ross, 2007). This study mainly focuses on the socio-psychological problems that journalists face in Pakistan while reporting on the war on terror from the three important regions of Peshawar, Swath and Waziristan. Before discussing the key relevant literature, it is essential to briefly dilate on the contextual information that surround this problem.

Conflict Journalism in Pakistan

The year 2014 witnessed killing of fourteen media professionals while performing their duties in country results in title for Pakistan as the "most dangerous country for journalists" labeled by International Federation of Journalists (IFJ, 2016). According to stats gathered by Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), as many as 59 Journalists were killed in Pakistan since 1992 with confirm motives while 21 were killed without confirm motives. In addition, seven media workers were also been killed during this period. The most targeted journalists were print reporters (39%) followed by broadcast reporters (32%), camera operators (19%) and photographers (19%). The remaining 23 percent were columnists, Internet bloggers, editors and technicians. In addition, three percent foreign correspondents also lost their lives while performing professional duties in Pakistan. The alarming facts also disclose that 56 percent journalists were murdered, 39 percent were killed due

to dangerous assignments while five percent became the victim of crossfire and combats. The highest numbers of journalist (37%) were killed while performing their duties in war beats while 31 percent were killed for reporting from crime beats (CPJ, 2016).

Rizwan (2014) in his review of a book 'Media Safety in Pakistan' examines the distinctive sorts of dangers and challenges confronted by the journalists for making a reasonable reporting. The book brought into talk the nature, force, assortment and level of dangers progressed to the journalists and the way in which they are exposed to those dangers. It portrays the part of security organizations, media houses and the writer unions in giving assurance to them for performing their job duties.

Media, War and Conflict

Wolfsfeld (2004) investigated that media is naturally disposed towards mode that increases pressure, struggle and viciousness. Maslog and Lee (2005) investigated that local clashes including Pak-India, Indonesia, Sri-Lanka, and Philippines, applying the Gultang's characterization of conflict reporting presumes that Kashmir issue covered by Indian and Pakistani media had most grounded war reporting outlines (Maslog & Lee, 2005). The scope on account of Pak-India on the Kashmir dispute in the American press is more likely in war reporting outlines (Siraj, 2008). In the same manner the contention casings in the Irish media are more prevalent than the pacification outlines (Fawcett, 2002). The serious media rivalry drove reporters to give active coverage to issues and make shocking features. Indonesian press demonstrates that because of no communicating bill, powerless media laws and absence of writers prompted to distributing of news stories having fiery impact in various Indonesian regions (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2006).

Despite all, several studies elaborate that media have not been totally working in war outlines. Shinar (2009) reviewed that daily papers inclination is towards 'war news-casting', yet daily papers did not totally dismiss peace news-casting. The review additionally reported chances to propel peace news-casting and expert practices.

Ortega (2000) found that the long working hours been the leading reason of stress for majority of media personals. Many of the journalists repeatedly operated more than the standard working hours i.e. 40 hours/week. Another survey done on Latin American journalists emphasizes some factors having associations for quality reporting in the region. While reporting on heavy time restraints, half of the respondents affirmed having less than four hours working time; many of the journalists stated that they work from their desk, having a direct connection with reality that they were reporting.

Cardona (2004) discovered that journalists in Colombia are typical, young, inexperienced and they are very low paid however they work more than eight hours/day. He further explained that for a journalist, in such circumstances, it is difficult make a career in any of media outlet. The main reason is organizations policies that compensates seniority or bonuses that stimulate any extra work. The most interesting part is that, Colombian media support new comer because of the fact that they agree to work more for a very low salary.

Research Questions

- RQ1. Do the media professionals feel threats during the coverage of conflict?
- RQ2. Do the media professionals consider patriotism more important than professionalism while reporting from the conflict zone?
- RQ3. Do the journalists suffer from psychological stress while reporting from the conflict zones?

Research Method

The researcher selected a total of 185 local journalists from the targeted areas for analysis. These included 25 members belonging to the press club of North Waziristan, 60 registered members of Swat press club and as many as 100 registered members of press club of Peshawar. Hence, a total of 185 journalists from three different areas, who have been the part of any media organization during 2005 or after and were registered with the local press club, are selected for inquisitorial. A well-designed questionnaire comprising open ended questions written in English was distributed among the selected population for collection of required data.

Research Findings

RQ1. Do the media professionals feel threats during the coverage of conflict?

Table 1. Threats to Media Persons during Conflict Reporting

Question	Agree	Disagree	Total	Chi-Square
Are journalists working under threat in war zone	157	22	179	101.816

Are journalists under threat from Militant	160	19	179	111.067
Are journalists under threat from law enforcement agencies	145	34	179	68.832
Impartial coverage lead to threat from militant	141	38	179	174.883
Impartial coverage lead to threat from law enforcement agencies	117	62	179	16.899

P values for all the above statistics was recorded below .05.

The research question for this study were designed to check the proximity of threat to media professional during coverage of military operations and armed conflicts in FATA, Swat and other areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. 157 journalists agreed that they feel threat while covering war zones and 22 disbarred this notion. Similarly, when asked about the party which they feel more threatening while performing their duties, it was learned that the number of journalists feeling threat from military and militant groups out of total 179 is 145 and 160, respectively which is to some extent an alarming response. While 19 journalists disagreed that they are working while baring any threats form militants and 34 practicing journalists shared that they feel no fear of harm from law enforcing agencies for reporting the conflict in due manners.

The majority of journalists (141 out of 179) agreed that imperial coverage of conflicts leads to threats from either parties – military or militant groups – so they have to follow the guiding line when reporting from conflict areas. 38 journalists were among those who are in disarray regarding the situation, either the fear caused them to not disclose their point of view so they refused to reveal.

Moreover, the same question was repeated and the respondents were asked that if they feel that impartial coverage of the conflict areas leads to threats from law enforcement agencies and it was recorded that 117 journalist agreed to this while the remaining 62 out of total 179 did not seem to agree with this statement and recorded their disagreement.

RQ2. Do the media professionals consider patriotism more important than professionalism while reporting from the conflict zone?

Table 2. Media Workers and Patriotism versus Professionalism

Question	Agree	Disagree	Total	Chi-Square
Patriotism is more important than professionalism	121	58	179	22.173
War on terror in Pakistan media is propagandist?	86	93	179	.274
Reporting on war on terror simply reflect the law and enforcement view	90	89	179	.006a
While, Reporting on war on terror, Editor in-charge based in head offices decision is final	90	89	179	.006a

Except for the first question, p values for the above statistics was recorded higher than .05

The researcher asked the media practitioners about their view point on patriotism and professionalism and nexus between them in case of reporting conflicts between state agencies and non-state militant groups. 121 journalists belonging to working class agreed that patriotism is more important than profession although they also agreed that being a journalist one should have to be self-accountable while doing his job and must not touch the areas that pose any branch to national interest. 58 journalists responded with disagreement as they are convinced that profession is far away from their personal likes and dislikes as well as patriotism.

The journalists were asked about their views about war on terrorism and propaganda in media of Pakistan. 86 journalists agreed that propaganda is there while more than fifty percent of the total selected population (93 out of 179) responded that this conspiracy has no real face in Pakistani media. A very marginal difference was observed in the views of journalists when they were asked to record their response regarding media report on war against terrorism. Half of the population agreed to this statement while the remaining slightly lesser than half disagreed to this opinion.

RQ3. Are the journalists suffering from psychological stress while reporting from the conflict zones?

Table 3. Journalists and their Exposure to Psychological Stress

Question	Agree	Disagree	Total	Chi-Square
Journalists are under stress while reporting from conflict zone.	111	68	179	10.330a
Journalists are psychological pressure while reporting from conflict zone.	147	32	179	73.883

Does psychological pressure forces a journalist to think about quitting his job	99	80	179	2.017a
Are media workers are suffering from lack of sleep, and other traumatic	154	25	179	94.944

P values for all the above statistics is below .05

The research study was an attempt to know the perception of local journalist regarding conflict reporting and its long lasting effects on their personal and professional life. Keeping in mind this objective, the researcher asked the respondents if they feel stressed while reporting from conflict areas to which, 111 agreed while the 68 disagreed to this opinion. Similarly, they were also asked if they feel any psychological pressure while reporting conflicts. 147 recorded their response as agreement to this statement while 32 said no to this opinion. Journalists were asked if the mental stress and psychological pressure of their job make them think to quit it anytime. 99 respondent replied that had thought of quitting this job because of stress and pressure they face while 80 journalist were confident enough to absorb this pressure. The respondents were of the view that most of them (154 out of 179) have to deal with post traumatic effects and shortage of sleep because of the nature of their job. 25 journalists shared that they are up to the challenge and know the demands of their profession that make them stronger to deal with such issues bravely.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study finds that majority of journalists are uncertain about the fundamental right of freedom of expression they enjoy and restrictions they face on the name of national interest and public diplomacy. They are less likely to the position of impartial reporting of conflict hit areas and hot spots. The military actions like targeted field strikes and armed operations against the terrorists groups, who are almost scattered to major regions of the country, are the litmus test for media to be objective and unbiased while reporting. The reporters based in remote areas with less resources and training are more exposed to the challenges and safety threats.

The study finds that most of the media workers do not have proper training regarding their safety when they are on field to cover the war zones. They mostly seek assistance from the armed forces which in result change their vision of seeing the truth with journalistic lens. The study also finds mental and psychological pressures on on-filed reporters that also produce question marks on the professional practices of journalism.

Stephanie (2005) in her study on the safety of journalists argued that to be a journalist in current era can be a deadly pursuit. According to her study on the assessment of perceptions and implementation of polices of two international wire services i.e. killing of journalist working in conflict zones, has become a routine business. She (2005) found policies regarding code of practice and safety of journalist to be flawed in terms of formulation, communication, implementation and reviews. Her findings suggested that mostly journalists are unaware of polices related to their safety and conduct hence, they practice self-made strategies to protect themselves which makes the policy ineffective as well as undermine their professional practices (Elizabeth, 2005). This study also found similar discrepancies in implementation of already existing policies for the safety of journalists. This research reported that majority of media professionals working in conflict zones are working under threats and bar various pressures. In this case, they do apply custom-made strategies to protect themselves that ultimately impact their reporting standards.

Journalists face real time danger and threads while performing their duties which itself is a phenomena contradicting to freedom of press in Pakistan. According to UNESCO report, a total of 178 locally based journalists were killed worldwide during 2013-14 but less than ten percent cases were judicially resolved which shows the intentions and seriousness of governments around the world towards safety of people connected with this profession (UNESCO, 2014).

Tojar (1999) finds out that reporters showed dissatisfaction related to their profession. In another study, Andres (2014) and his fellow scholars find out the percentage of unsatisfied Spanish journalists to be very high as seventy percent were trying to alter their profession. To reduce stress, spend more time with their family, get rid of frustration and earn more money were counted as the core reasons to alter job in Spain. The findings of this study have similarities to the studies conducted in other parts of the world. The research finds that more than fifty percent of the journalists in KP and FATA feel stressed while reporting from conflict areas. Similarly, they also feel psychological pressure while reporting conflicts. Journalists selected for this study were asked if the mental stress and psychological pressure of their job make them think of quitting it anytime and it was found that majority of them had thoughts of quitting their job because of stress and pressure they face while a hand full of journalists were confident enough to absorb this pressure.

Taking this notion to a step forward, the study found that majority of journalists who cover war zones in KP and FATA are more exposed to psychological/ mental stress yet they do not want to quit their job despite aware of being in the danger zone. They are quite aware of the consequences as well as challenges and demand of their profession still they contribute their efforts in the fear of losing their jobs if they do not do so. The research also found that respondents of this study had to deal with post traumatic effects and shortage of sleep because of the nature of their job while a simple minority of them feels that they are up to the challenge and know the demands of their profession that make them stronger to deal with such issues bravely.

Taking the discussion to theatrical grounds, it was observed that Hierarchy of Influence is very much applicable to the findings of this study as well. The hierarchy model takes a glimpse at various impacts on messages of media and at how those impacts help to get to the final result. It identifies five factors of impact that are distinguished and yet common including routines, extra-media (institutional), individual, organizational, and ideological level of impacts. These factors were measured for this study as well and it was observed that the individual relation of media persons impacts their professional practices. Moreover, it was also established that organizations may influence the minds of their workers in the name of organizational policies and standard operating procedures, institutions of state and its various departments may pose serious impacts on journalists' practices and dismantle their objective and unbiased position by providing one sided forced version on any matter to be shared with masses. While the ideological and sociocultural settings are also found influential at the next level where a media worker despite having professional obligations, follows his personal will. The journalists in KP and FATA are not apart from these cases as they have their individual as well as family identities which somehow influence their working style.

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