

Professional Roles and Influences of Journalism in Pakistan

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Abstract: *Conflict coverage is a tough task for any journalist who is a member of a community or has an affiliation with any of the conflicting parties. Moreover, such events have some moral and professional dilemmas. Such dilemmas create tension between the professionalism of journalists and their feeling for their community. This piece of research, focusing on journalism in Pakistan, explores how reporters think of their position in struggling-affected societies. Face-to-face interviews with journalists explore their reflections and state their roles. The findings display journalists do now not have a black-and-white identity but an unpredictable one. Journalists now affix a position of journalism and relevant concepts in society. Journalism between multiple identities of journalists moves differently depending upon the situation.*

Key Words: Journalism, Influences, Watchdog, Advocacy, Self-censorship

Introduction

Journalism has a challenging role in shaping the perceptions of public knowledge, conflict and peace retention. Journalism is not about information spread but defining critical situations, framing them and deliberate efforts to promote them. This is the reason for journalist roles in information mediation is acknowledged and defined. Conflicts have many difficulties for journalists. Conflict promotion and converting conflict into peaceful situations is still difficult for journalists. Meanwhile, journalists' professional and ethical dilemma still exists there. Journalist, in a conflict society, reestablishes their professional duties (Andresen, et al., 2017).

In order to understand the role of journalists in conflicting societies, we need to look into the journalist's affiliation with their society. This article explores the role of

journalists in a conflict-affected society (Pakistan) as a case study.

Pakistan has so many conflicts from nationalism to political affiliation and from ethnicity to racism. Pakistan has been made on such a theme that it could not separate itself from such problems. Conflicts are various and the role-playing is limited by all the segments of society. Society has given more power to media for conflict escalation and media is the powerful key actor to perform its duty responsible in order to have a peaceful environment.

This article will address the following research questions:

1. What are the professional roles of journalists in Pakistan?
2. What are the participating powers affecting journalistic work?

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Professional Roles of Journalists

Journalists explain them in multiple ways. The study of journalists' conceptions of their professional tasks and their social understanding of their moral duties is the key to understanding their professional behaviours and roles (Mellado, 2015).

There is a wide range of research on journalism, which categorizes journalistic roles in different ways (Christians et al., 2009). Although journalism has some global ethics it is operated within and under the umbrella of social, economic and cultural forces. Journalism roles are not homogeneous but different in different localities (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

They show that journalists' ethical and intellectual ideas are tangled with forces of political, economic and media configurations in which journalism is rooted. Therefore, journalism as a discursive production can provide a conceptual framework to account for different views on journalism (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018).

While examining the duties and roles of journalists, different concepts are considered. A few of the researchers identified them as role conceptions and role performances (Mellado et al., 2017) and others denote them as cognitive, normative roles (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). This is to difference between 'what journalists ought to do, what they want to do, what they do in practice and what they think or say they do' (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). There is always a difference in journalists' duties and how they perform them (Hellmueller and Mellado, 2015). This situation exists due to the common nature of human being who is influenced by their social system. Sometimes, situations are objective but at times, things are manipulated which effect journalists' professional duties (Reich and Hanitzsch, 2013). This article focuses on the role of journalists as it is in accordance with social responsibility.

Journalism in Conflicts

Conflict is such a hostile environment for journalists to face the risk of life, imprisonment or injuries. Journalists are supposed to stay impartial which is very difficult for them as their normative approach in their profession.

Media is a part of propaganda. When media becomes a propaganda tool, Journalist impartiality becomes a question mark. Journalists will support their idea (McLaughlin, 2016).

Coverage of one party amongst conflicting stakeholders is a moral and professional dilemma. Moreover, patriotism can influence journalistic duties and roles. Understanding journalists' shift in ideas from professional to ethnic community is to recognize that they are human beings and can change their ideas at any stage. Journalists are the reflection and mirror of any society or ethnicity. A journalist does adopt their role as their choice (Hallin, 2017).

Methodology

This study explored the professional behaviour of the people belonging to the journalism industry. How the forces involved in reporting process affect the working behaviour of the reporter. The data is based on face-to-face interviews with 35 journalists and editors working for different media. The interview duration was almost one hour. Interviews are recorded digitally. They were conducted in Islamabad by the researcher. A researcher has recorded the interviews for reference quotes. The sample of the study was professionals from the information industry. All the participants of this research have been associated with professional media organizations and associations working for journalists and journalism.

This research has focused on the Pakistani problems of journalists in reporting the issues belonging to any part of conflict and the challenges they are facing while reporting. After interview recordings, the themes of this research have been classified. This gives a better understanding of journalistic behaviours with deep insight into conflicting stories and pressures while reporting them.

The Roles of Journalists

The interview revealed that journalists have other forms of affiliations as well. They do have party journalism, party journalism pushes journalists to collaborate with the leadership and no criticism. Party journalism does a watchdog role on rival groups and parties.

Journalists associate themselves with neutral journalism and negate the concept of partiality and that they are professional and report with accuracy. Different roles are legitimized by the journalist and these accounts provide pieces of evidence of transformation in journalists' self-understanding about their roles. Journalist of multiple opinions articulated their professional role and has various degrees of understanding in monitoring political business persons. They perform their role in education and change informing people about societal problems. However, the thematic analysis focuses on the dissemination of information in terms of watchdog, and advocacy roles.

Journalist's Role as Watchdog

Journalism in Pakistan is said to have committed to having a watchdog role in journalism. They also stated that it is a role which is challenging to practice. The watchdog role of journalism is a necessary element of any democratic society, involving keeping an eye on those elites in power, disapproving of their unlawful activity and making them accountable before the law. There are certain indicators of the watchdog role of media. These indicators are the following; economic influences; press freedom and socio-political context Marquez-Ramirez et al., 2019. In a transitional country like Pakistan, journalists are more interventionist and do ask more questions without even noticing the severity of the question. Journalists are not so accommodating or collaborative in their roles and professional duties. Journalists took assertive roles e.g. monitoring the political leaders (Miloni, 2017). The watchdog role of the media is an adversary to the government. It does motivate political activities. This role is adopted by a few journalists in Pakistan.

In the interviews for this study, journalists are of the opinion that it was their responsibility to let elites under the umbrella of accountability. They openly ask questions and disapprove of their wrongdoings. Political clientelism creates more interventionist watchdog roles amongst journalists. One question which arises here is who is the beneficiary? If it's the public then it is ok otherwise problematic (Personal interview, 2022)

We sometimes have leaked scandals or documents related to the Pakistani political elites or relevant to other social issues, but that's it. I haven't seen a journalist in Pakistan who is taking or doing follow-up stories or investigating an issue further in the last decade (Personal interview, 2022)

State interventions and political parallelism undermine the autonomy of journalism. They don't let the journalist investigate the issue in depth. One of the journalists has stated that our media owners are having relations with the political elite and this stops the media houses to disseminate any information which is against their interest (Personal interview, 2022). Journalism is affected by such a similar community. During the ongoing political conflict, and economic crisis in Pakistan, journalists have taken the side of governing bodies.

How much a journalist studies peace negotiations is an important matter concerning the Pakistani situation. Journalism blackouts are there in the field and sometimes, these are to assure that government and the opponent party are stepping back to resolve the matters otherwise, the priority of the journalist is public and nothing else.

Disseminator Role

Talking about the reporter's role, they are of the opinion that accurate reporting is a highly professional role. Accuracy is concerned and altered where media owners' interests and the political elite's interests are subjective. Information is manipulated according to the stakeholder's interests except for the public. Journalists are of the opinion that they are approached by political elites and politicians to stop spreading information against them.

Information cross-checking is the basic duty of the journalist and once reporters try to do it, they are treated with malign tactics from the officials. They face political traumas. The reporter stressed that politicians often reject their request to interview them which stops them to verify information and to give a balanced opinion on media. It becomes difficult for them to give the opinion of both the opponents in conflicting situations (Personal interview, 2022).

Journalism is vulnerable to aggravating conflict between the communities. For, reconciliation, it is important that both parties should understand each other. There are a few journalists who are established as community journalists and take care of the interests of their community. The number is low but they represent their community. This has been proven that journalism has played a pivotal role and played a bridge between societies and improved mutual understanding between policymakers and opponents (Gonen and Hoxha, [2019](#)).

Journalist's Advocacy Role

Journalists of those states having conflict give their journalists more roles to play. The journalist is the key actor to perform advocacy for peace. Interviews with the media practitioner proved that journalists in Pakistan who are promoting peace are not in paradox with their professional values of fairness. They regard it by saying that it's in the interest of their own communities. When we live in a state other than our own....we could answer it differently but as far as you are patriotic with your community, you have to have concerns about it (Personal interview, 2022)

Only a few journalists are said to perform roles as peacebuilders. This situation is with all those who have faced subjugation in past. This idea is closely related to Lynch's ([2016](#)) argument about journalism and society which face conflict, try to avoid it.

Peace journalism is challenging for its role in society. Journalists can show the news in favour of conflict and could escalate it. It is, therefore the moral obligation of the journalist to make choices wisely. Journalist behaviour would de-escalate the conflict if used proper way. The journalist's role should be neutral in a way that it helps communities to evolve in future than to keep contesting (Personal interview, 2022).

All media practitioners are not the advocate of peace-building and issue-resolving minds. They agree with the criticism directly and denial of peace journalism. They do not actually understand the power of media and its influence in terms of production, political and media structures in which media is functioning (Hanitzsch, [2007](#)).

In Pakistan, where multiple ethnic groups are there and these ethnic groups are rigid. It is difficult for journalists to stay away from their ethnic group and promotes patriotism and peace journalism. However, journalists try to avoid direct criticism by promoting peace journalism as a normative duty of themselves to retain the objectivity of the profession (Loyn, [2007](#)).

It is because a few journalists acknowledge the difficulty of maintaining impartiality when reporting conflicting situations.

Political Pressures and Self-censorship for Journalists

Conflict shapes the reporting patterns of any community. These narratives make the stance for suppressing the legitimacy of any administration. There are multiple connotations which are associated with the reporting narratives such as pseudo-state, and words like "so-called leaders" etc. journalists have imposed some self-censorship rules upon themselves in order to avoid conflict with the political elites and media managers. This first take of the journalist is to go and see journalism through the lenses of media managers.

There is no one but us (ourselves to control us and put some normative obligations upon us in order to avoid conflicts with political and economic powers. We apply self-censorship (Personal interview, 2022).

One of the participants of this study stated and argued that journalists are scared to take a confrontational position towards government policies as they fear that it may lead to them in isolation, rejection or personal attack.

If you write anything adversarial to the government, it could create problems for you and your organization. Therefore, you cannot write freely. You should be careful of what you say. You should avoid stories that might put you in a problematic condition. (Personal interview, 2022)

Organizational Influences on Journalists

Media economies have changed the media culture. It has put extra pressure on journalists. They are stuck between professional and professional duties. At the same time, they are under pressure of more stories which are based

on sensationalism. Online media has also influenced the traditions and working behaviour of traditional media. Now, the nature of social media is different and things go on in a speedy way. Media owners now want to cope with the time speed of online media which is not possible at all but this is altering the professional ethics of journalism. The concept of breaking news has shortened the time to produce news and verified information. Misinformation is affecting the credibility of the journalist but it is going amongst us. This effect the peace process and any false or wrong information which is delivered in a hurry could lead to escalation of conflict.

One of these journalists for this study has regretted his own stories and said that: I think stories were delivered so soon that though these didn't affect the peace talks alter his credibility and that it was too early to cover those stories (Personal interview, 2022).

Media is also subjugated through the media owners. Media ownership influences the media workers to deliberate coverage of the conflict or any event. Ownership is not one name but it is a combination of private and political coalition. They all equally affect the news production process. Allocations of resources within organizations are pro-government. Profit expectation and advertising are the leading forces for media. Interference of these channels creates a gap between the professional duties of journalists and their practice (Mellado & Van Dallen, 2014). Journalists who are less controlled perform their professional role with more accuracy than those under control. One of the participants of this research is of the opinion that what we do is not journalism. We do a report. Journalists cross-check its information and investigate. We are not doing it. Political persons make statements and we report them to people. Can we say the thing they don't want the public to know? That is where journalism fabrics are and not what we do (personal interview, 2022).

Media owners, political elites, and advertising are the key actors and significant determinants in the production process of news.

Patriotic Sentiments within Journalists

Neutrality in Pakistani journalism is a big question mark. A journalist always has his/her inclinations toward any political party or leaning toward one side of the conflict or ethnicity. Many journalists have lost their identities and credibility in the promotion of their ethnic group and society (Zandberg and Neiger (2005). One of the participants of this research suggested that considering patriotism is a certain component of their profession in Pakistan. Journalist chooses his community over professionalism. Some of the sample of this study said that they try to stay neutral in their professional role and influences. Rather others are of the opinion that their mindset is created through their community so they cannot avoid community in order to stay neutral. One of the participants stated that he avoids writing anything for the community he doesn't know because he cannot write anything which is actually true for such a community and cannot do justice for their intents (Personal interview, 2022).

Discussion and Conclusion

This research looked into journalism as a profession and the notion of journalists in order to see their role and to see those forces involved in influencing journalists. The sample and its results show that journalists are loyal to their duties as journalists and the spread of information. There are certain subjugations which affect their professional duties and these are; economic censorship, political pressure etc. Journalists' impartiality is affected by the inconsistency in their identical and professional domains as humans. Generally, traditional society and modern society shared their beliefs in order to define journalistic roles. There are certain duties imposed on people related to the flow of information in conflicting societies.

Interference between media ownership and access to information restricts the practices of journalists. Moreover, there are differences in the ways journalism is conceptualized. Collectively, this research gives an overall understanding of the journalist's role and practices. Journalist particularly changes their ideologies and these

are not fixed. Journalist goes on change in accordance with the situation in their society.

Journalism is following in the footsteps of modern societies. Journalists are not always following their professional roles such as watchdog, advocacy and impartiality. There are not only political economic and media structures which affect journalistic values but pressure of conflict also.

Journalists are always in a position to compromise with the prevailing situation and this is not always with all the people related to the information industry. The results are variant. The adoption of social behaviours by journalists is even different in different conflicting situations (Hanitzsch and Vos, [2017](#)). Journalists carry on changing circumstances in pre-conflict and post-conflict times.

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