POLICY OF PAKISTANI TV CHANNELS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE JOURNALISTS

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Abstract

Since the time of its emergence, television medium has always been considered as a significant source of communication that has very strong impact on human affairs. TV media hold the strength to cultivate a perception and then reshape it accordingly. This study examined journalists' opinion towards the news coverage of Pakistani tv channels their policies and their own social responsibility. Drawing on the interviews of the journalists, the study illustrates that media ethics are not being followed because of irresponsible behavior of tv medium as well as tv channels' policies. Priming and framing concept has accumulated tv journalism due to varying policy factors. TV news channels are only covering few major cities of the country. Media has been divided into halves that aim at doing business instead of doing social responsibility that it used to act upon during earlier times of journalism.

Keywords: *Framing, journalists, media ethics, news, Pakistan, priming, television channels.*

Introduction:

Television plays a vital role in spreading information among the masses. Media plays its vital role in shaping the minds of its publics. Just like the media effect theory of 1920s, for many people media is still like a magic bullet that hit them like a magic bullet or a needle through which the message gets injected into their brains (Barker, 2009). Yet in today's

scenario, there is a huge number of audiences that is active rather than being passive like old days. They perceive the information according to their suitability and reacts if something is not being done rightfully (Schudson, 1982). Now in the process of the dissemination, journalists collect data from various sources, edit it into proper information and then finally disseminate the news towards the masses (Druckman, 2005). Liberty of media is considered to be of great significance for societies which are extremely democratic to complete its duty of disseminating information as a major source of watchdog, while the extreme right of being free media emphasizes to perform its duties more responsibly and accurately.

TV news channels have a major role in shaping the perception of various publics (Golan, 2006). Like it is important to know the attitude of the public regarding various news channels, the same way knowing attitude of media practitioners is also important. It is their attitude, one of the factors, wherein news coverage is actually forming its shape (Gardez, 2015). Also, every media channel has set certain rules and regulations to follow (Agha & Hussain, 2017). Thus, in the light of social responsibility theory, the researchers interviewed Pakistani journalists to learn their attitude re news coverage that the general public is being exposed to on a daily basis. Researchers tried to interview as many of news journalists of Karachi as they could as per their convenience and availability of the journalists either in person or on a telephonic communication. Results of the study are made with the help of thematic analysis wherein interviews were analyzed under the following themes.

News coverage of Pakistani TV channels

In a question regarding TV news coverage in Pakistan, journalists shared their mixed views. Mazhar Abbas shared his insightful renditions regarding the current scenario of Pakistani TV news coverage as he talked about the current era, media is strongly being polarized these days and is divided into different groups. It seems media has started to fall into multiple categories under the list of several agendas while this behavior has started to accumulate all private media channels, and consequently they have begun to support political parties. During the time of PPP government and when the elections of 2008 were held, this division of party favoring journalism started to observe more and more and the picture began to clear that one media circle is standing along with PPP and the other circle is favoring PMLN. Same happened in 2013 and the media channels were divided by their hidden agendas and then few media circles started to have sides with PTI, while the others supported PLMN and so the agendas are still on the roll and one can clearly observe which channel is following or supporting the particular political party. So, all these things damaged the media and also media itself behaved irresponsibly. When this tag of

polarizing is stamped on any media, it ultimately damages the credibility of that channel and the medium itself. People started to watch some giant TV stations just because they favored their supported parties and this division got even clear that one channel is pro PTI and the other is pro PMLN. This image which media itself had built was not such an ideal picture for an objective media and such situation is still on the roll and being carried by our media channels.

Mubashir Zaidi also shared his opinion regarding the scenario of TV news coverage. According to him, the televsion news coverage holds less substance and lots of noise and loudness; that is why we usually see the trend of breaking news is being followed by every other channel. He reflected that breaking news of TV channels, in terms of their less substance, should not be there longer than half hour but firstly, it revolves on screen for hours and then they also make it a part of main news bulletin. Most of the times it is not that valuable which we might add it into main news bulletin, but it is happening. That is the strategy that TV channels use to engage the audience with their channel and they, however, get attention most of the times. They are broadcasting sensationalism and we have yet to observe the professional journalism like BBC and CNN where news stories don't change every next hour and the main stories remain the center point even after hours. So, the sudden shift of main news stories isn't the right way, and this might take a long while to overcome these mistakes. He further shared that "every news as it arrives, becomes a breaking news and the channels begin to disseminate it with tickers and in a separate window they repeat the same thing several times imposing it on the mind of audience again and again. So, the thing is what actually is the real substance in that breaking news?"

Few journalists shared that the news coverage of Pakistani TV channels moves around three major cities of Pakistan which are Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore. "We rarely see prolong news coverage from Peshawar and have totally forgotten Quetta and various parts of Baluchistan" one journalist showed concern. A journalist added, "there are some reasons behind that these areas remain uncovered, not because we don't want to cover; we do really want to explore these parts of our country, but the thing is that the hidden forces don't allow us to go in those areas and we have to stay out of them by all means". There are many areas in KPK and FATA which are still out of their journalistic reach and have remained so till now. While reflecting on news coverage of rural areas cited that "rural and small cities are completely ignored. No reports come from those areas and no issues are highlighted from these areas of the country".

Another media practitioner added to the same point that media give less coverage while it is focusing on news angling these days. He added, "there is a concept of news

filters and in total there are 6 news filters. One of the major news filters is your sponsor or supporter who get involves in your news coverage. Every other channel has their sponsor or supporter and those are mostly from political or religious parties. Every news has some sort of political or religious supporter behind and that news is angled according to the political or religious interests. So, in Pakistan there is not any kind of pure journalistic activity right now". Also added by Rameez Ahmed that the basic desire of news coverage is to inform, to educate and to entertain, so news must have all these qualities. Pakistani news channels are also doing the same, no matter if more or less. He elaborated that "even they are doing 110% and even more, as our news is not always a hardcore news story, we also give side angle packages which consist of all the facts, figures and statistics and sometimes we also include some Indian music. Doing so is good or bad, it is a different debate but if we ponder over how news channels are doing the right coverage and fulfilling their responsibilities, they are absolutely doing all these things for coverage". It is considered that news of print media is for literate people since you must have knowledge that how to read before you begin to read the newspaper but if we talk about TV media, it is for everyone, everywhere so you have to present news in a way that is understandable in that particular aspect. One can rely on multiple things to carry the specific message to the audience. Nonetheless, news channels are doing what they should be doing except one or two channels.

Journalists emphasized that news channels highlight a very negative image and almost all the channels are doing the same after one another and that is what attracts viewers the most. For instance, if they see the footage of someone fighting, they like to see that kind of content that how the fight started and how it came to an end, "how are they beating each other and even if we talk about any political scenario we take it as negatively". These things should be under control, "but we repeatedly play them that it becomes irritating for the viewers", stated a journalist. Raheel Baig threw light on the same concern, "we have seen a lot of news coverage on the recent garbage situation in Karachi. Media should show that as well, but can you tell how many times you have seen the soft image of Karachi city propagated by the TV medium? Do the media cover the historical aspects of Karachi city like Mohatta palace, Frere Hall, Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim as frequently as they highlight the negative stuff. So, if we highlight softer side and positive image of our country then it will ultimately build our country's positive image".

Few journalists showed concerns that today's news coverage is mostly biased. Now the government is imposing censorship but in previous days, most of the channels were favoring one popular political party while the other channels were favoring the other popular political party. So, in that case we may say that yellow journalism is also being observed lately. Aqsa Mehmood while sharing her views discussed that it is no surprise to

anyone that news coverage by Pakistani media channel is not as good as it used to be. These days they are highly biased, and every other channel has its hidden agenda which they follow.

Perspective on the standard of news stories

Journalists shared their thoughts on the standard of news stressing that many things are missing in every news story that we see on a regular basis, it varies channel to channel. Some TV programs show one side while the other shows opt for another approach, but the thing is that people however get aware of the situation whatsoever is happening. News reaches to the masses no matter how media portrays it, but it is also true that the treatment of news stories by different channels varies. Some broadcast the story with additional hype and exaggeration while others give average time to the same story. On the behaviour of tv news channels one media person stressed that "nonetheless, there are many sensitive issues on which we observe irresponsible behavior of our TV news channels and at some point, they also impress everyone by playing their role very responsibly. There is an ongoing situation which further needs to be better if we want our media channels to raise their standards". Mubashir Zaidi added that today's TV journalism is running on the phrases of he said/she said as they receive press releases and the statements from multiple organizations, they do not need to use such format as they have to rely upon actual 5Ws and 1H and the substance. It is clear that a lot needs to be done for the balanced news coverage. For instance, if someone has given a huge statement then reporters do not have much time to analyze the diverse aspects of the main issue that has been told in the statement while independently investigating the whole matter. The detailed investigation, however, is being carried in print media but due to time constraints in TV journalism, this diverse element is yet to be observed.

Munaizae Jahangir highlighted another side that "sometimes it is balanced, and we try our best to be objective and balanced with all news stories, but it depends on reporters and the measurement of objectivity and biasness varies also". She further added, "it is not like media is always biased but we have witnessed many great journalists within our TV media, and they have worked hard for the betterment of journalism and had been a part of journalism for a very long period".

Senior journalists who have lots of experience and they are the leaders of this field, are still following the trend of objective journalism and even in those channels where senior editors are still working and having strong editorial boards, still follow journalistic values and norms. On the contrary, if we move forward and look towards the entire scenario, some problem will be observed. One journalist talked about tv news scenario, "I

think that news media in the golden past was at the top of its game worldwide but if we look around, the news media has lost its standard and is no longer the same as it used to be and so is the case in Pakistani TV journalism". Another journalist shed light on two divisions of news channels, one is pure news segment which consists of main news, headlines, bulletin and breaking news, while the other segment is news production which consists of hourly political shows or talk shows. In those talk shows there are many anchors who have been given privilege to express their own views or sometimes they just follow the channel's policies. So, the anchors share their thoughts as well which may sometimes conflict the channel's policy, nonetheless the channel also uses those opinions in front of others that they have balanced news coverage and they are not in favor of only one particular group; they have spoken against all who should be criticized and have favored those who need to be praised. However, all this happens with the agreement of owners and the anchors and they do not do things for the sake of journalism but for their own personal interests. It was of huge concern to all media practitioners that either Pakistani news channels cover balanced news stories or not. It was largely considered that maximum channels are trying but there is no ideal situation even in foreign media. In a personal meeting a media person talked about foreign tv channels, "if you visit any other country any other society, for instance let's talk about USA, there are lots of TV channels in US and if you see CNN, they portray news stories in their own way while FOX news has its own way of covering news. CNN comes heavy on Donald trump whereas the FOX news takes Trump much more lightly so, you can't say if US media is even covering balanced news stories. At times you feel kind of personal touch in news coverage all around the world". If we debate on Pakistani news channels, such as ARY and GEO, even a layman can easily recognize who is favoring whom.

Every channel has its own editorial policies due to which they treat a news story accordingly and being a news reporter or being a news anchor, they all know that how they should treat the news story. Balanced news coverage will be found nowhere. They however try their best to keep the balanced approach, but the ideal situation is found nowhere. Some media persons believed that channels always try their best to manage and maintain things equally as in, if a certain news arrived, all perspectives should be included equally. However, there is always some space for improvement, sometimes it also lacks the equality in the perspective, but all media channels always try to step forward with every option available for balanced news coverage. And when it does not happen that is because of their personal interest that is considered as a flaw in the media industry. Journalists stressed upon the betterment of the media industry. It is very much required not only for the improvement of the media but also for the welfare of the society who is watching these programs. Additionally, Raheel Baig pointed that today's era is TRPs era and so most of the times they do not limit themselves to the right and to the wrong. He added, "we

sometimes also exaggerate things but it is according to the policy, you see if we just broadcast the normal story without any spice, the audience will not get engaged and there would not be any TRP so, for generating more TRPs channels often apply this strategy". It is also due to public demand as today's viewer does not want to see the old-fashioned news pattern. Moreover, one respondent expressed grief that Pakistani media is just losing its level day by day not only in Pakistan but also in foreign countries. The perspective of covering balanced news story is diminishing with time.

Journalistic objectivity in news coverage

Almost all respondents gave the same viewpoint regarding objectivity in news coverage. Media is strongly being polarized these days and is divided into different groups. When this tag of polarization is stamped on any media, it ultimately damages the credibility of the channel and the medium itself. There are few channels holding the editorial boards and they edit the news even the programs like talk shows and supervise the shows while particularly taking care of news programs. So, the editorial board is an extremely required element by all the media channels which must keep an eye on journalistic objectivity and take care of the sensitive content. Every TV news channel must have its own editorial board having a complete authority to edit the program in the favor of its viewers not just their agendas. It will bring check and balance within the media and if this happens internally in all news channels, journalistic objectivity will be observed and will be improved in no time.

According to Mubashir Zaidi, objective journalism is not even carried out in USA. While explaining situation in the US media he said, "in America, there is trump favoring media and there is anti-trump media, so they nonetheless are the so-called flag-bearers of human rights and freedom of speech. In our neighbor country India, there is pro Modi, anti-Modi media. In Pakistan a huge polarization exists here as well that the objective journalism is such a difficult thing to sustain". There are journalists who are making their efforts to carry out objective journalism, but they are very few and less than 10% of journalists in print media but in TV, there might not be even 2% of journalists who are perusing objective journalism. One media person grieved that journalism is losing its objectivity and it has only become the mean of running business and earning more money. It is not hidden from anyone that how news stories are being covered by media persons but as a matter of fact they also try their best to be objective but there are multiple challenges and obstacles which create hurdles to walk on objective path. Firstly, PEMRA, it creates hurdle like it demands them to maintain the page of a narrative and ideology of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Iqbal and many other national leaders. And when journalists ask them about their ideologies that what those narratives and ideologies

actually were, then they tell them about their own interpretation regarding those narratives. One journalist grieved over the matter of national ideologies of past great leaders, "you will be surprised to know that what they interpret about the ideologies of such great leaders, that interpretation makes some very senior social workers and national leaders nothing but a traitor, that is how they interpret things". Another journalist also stressed that if the state's narrative gets changed time to time with such huge variation then what would be its actual narrative or with what narrative should they go forth or is there any uniform narrative to be stand with. "Since they are still in a doubt about their narrative then what they expect from us to do exactly".

It was also assumed that young talent is now joining the field of TV journalism and they are all passionate to be the part of industry. There are proper degree programs for Mass Media these days and today's young journalists are coming in this field having enough academic background then the previous generation used to have. However, when they start to work with any TV channel, the channel's policy bound them that they must follow their guidelines and that is the point where their sense of journalistic objectivity begins to diminish. It was also assumed that there are different mediums, one is electronic, the other is digital media so both are different in nature and so journalistic objectivity varies accordingly. Journalists working in electronic media are strictly bound to the channel's policy and they will not do anything which goes against the policy of their channel. On the other hand, there is digital media whose journalists are slightly separated from this policy bounding and they work little bit independently. So, the digital medium provides at least some freedom and its journalists can cover news stories which they find suitable.

It was widely accepted by few media persons that journalistic objectivity is followed by those who actually follow the values of journalism. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, journalism is not actually journalism, instead it is a general-ism. "So, do not think anything like journalistic objectivity exist in our country". It is really hard to consider today's journalism as an objective journalism. Not just Pakistani media but even the international media is not so much objective in this case. All media houses are biased and this division of biasness is even higher in Pakistan as we clearly see that many media channels are supporting one popular political party where on the other hand, some favor other popularized political party and even there are some channels which support anonymous powers about which everyone talks, but it cannot be referred directly by the name. Consequently, Pakistani media has divided itself in a worst way possible.

Very few journalists see objectivity on a medium level while saying there is no ideal situation. As Pakistani TV media is still very young and is at the age of 18 years as it

came into being in 2002 when the revolutionary boom came which brought many private TV channels to a doubtful situation that created panic in the society. A lawlessness situation was also observed at that time and every other day there were bomb blasts around the country and the news coverage of that time seemed to be promoting the anarchy. But that era has gone long ago, and they nonetheless have come out of those hard times of terrorism, but they have also learned many things from that time, since the media got matured from their own mistakes that they had committed in past. They have learned that how they should bring diversity in questions and which news should be covered in what manner. Thus, their knowledge, their experience and their surrounding come handy to achieve the objectivity in several matters and maximum number of journalists are doing so. Pointed by a media person, "if you won't be objective and take anyone's side then our viewer is mature enough that he/she can identify that you are being biased". Lastly, one of the journalists favored their journalistic objectivity while saying that like the press, TV journalists also try their best to ensure the objectivity and to portray all aspects of a news story, but improvement is always required. At times media becomes biased and many channels take sides of certain political parties and this division is huge these days. As a result, there are different policies of every channel like some encourage specific party while other support another major political party. Consequently, this ultimately affects journalistic objectivity and so no media house bears perfect model of journalistic objectivity.

Discussion

Journalists have observed a great deal of transition in past and present news coverage of TV channels. TV medium in today's era has been highly polarized and since the general elections of 2008, the trend of party favoring journalism is being flourished. Now every other channel, except a few, are doing party favor journalism. All these things damage media industry since the tag of polarization is stamped on any media channel, it eventually damages the credibility of the particular channel and the medium itself and so it has been observed lately by the journalists. The study also revealed the content of news coverage is based on more noise and less substance. Breaking news trend is just a perfect example every now and then, all media channels use the strategy of this term "breaking news" to get viewers' attention and there is no any actual substance, but they repeatedly show the same thing and impose it on viewer's mind. Another main aspect discovered through this study is that TV media is only covering the events of major cities of Pakistan namely Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad whereas the same TV medium rarely looks towards the rural side of the country; also KPK, Baluchistan and FATA are those areas which bear less coverage while some of them are even not yet covered.

The study also found that TV news channels prefer priming and framing of news than doing reporting in a real sense. Every other TV news channel has political and religious alliance with different groups and hence news stories are angled according to the specific support; the same goes for the state-owned channel. If the basic function of news is to educate; inform and entertain, then all these functions are being fulfilled but the question looms how. Pakistani TV news channels are often highlighting the negativity and they repeatedly show conflicts of politicians. Business factor is also involved as now journalism has no actual interest rather making money in the name of journalism. TV media is more biased due to this factor and yellow journalism and sensationalized content is at its peak. Standards of news stories vary channel wise. Some channels portray only one-sided story while few portray the other angle. There are a few channels that are doing justice to all the perspectives of a single news story. Another aspect which is undermining the standards of news stories is 'who said journalism' which is due to the press releases that media organizations get from multiple institutes to make their news reports. The 5Ws and 1H format is rarely followed because the reliance is on the press releases. This also raises questions on blandness and credibility of news because they are self-written reports of organization which are intended to ensure that everything about their organization must be portrayed well. The quickness of electronic medium specially of TV also plays a huge role in the news standards as the reporters have to report at his earliest, so that their channel could run the news earlier. This quickness sometimes ends up on the false or wrong or misguided information. In this aspect, print media is more credible due to the reason of having more time to investigate things more accurately.

The factor of biasness also varies from reporter to reporter whereas, media is not always biased. There are many senior journalists who still follow the trend of balanced news coverage and they are the leaders of this field. They are still following the trend of objective journalism and even in those channels where senior editors are still working and having strong editorial boards, still follow journalistic values and norms. TV channels like CNN and Fox news, they are also divided in different categories and their news coverage differs from each other. The pattern of news coverage basically depends on a channel's policies and agenda and so news coverage is treated accordingly. Also, journalists working in TV news media are bound to cover news stories according to their channels' policy whereas journalists of digital media have more freedom in this regard since they choose stories that they think are suitable for their medium. Pakistani TV media is still standing on its initial stages and TV medium is still young and immature. It still needs time and experience to go a long way in the light of journalistic standards. Nonetheless, viewers have turned mature since they can easily determine whether particular channel is biased or objective. On the contrary, journalism has become another business for making revenues.

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