

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN PAKISTAN: TV NEWS JOURNALISTS' PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore TV News Journalists' perspectives regarding freedom of expression and social responsibility in Pakistan and how these journalists practice it in their profession. Moreover, factors influencing these practices were also inquired. Employing an exploratory research design, 10 semi-structured interviews with TV News Journalists were conducted. Thematic analysis of interviews revealed that TV News Journalists are well aware of the role of freedom of expression and social responsibility in coverage of socio-political issues. In the present situation, they are unable to practice journalism with responsibility as News Channels compete with TRP and Breaking News. Authentication of news suffers in this context. Journalists are unable to practice their freedom of expression and social responsibility as they cannot go against organizational policies. It seems as if they are doing jobs only without fulfilling their journalistic responsibilities in true spirit. They face certain pressures while covering socio-political issues. These pressures are organizational policies, political parties, religious groups, personal political and religious affiliations and the financial status of Journalists. Government and state institutions also try to influence the freedom of expression and social responsibility of media. Resultantly the objectivity of News content gets compromised. PEMRA established to regulate the electronic media, appeared to be failed in doing so. Compromised freedom of expression and social responsibility is becoming a source of political polarization in society.

Keywords: Freedom of Expression, Social Responsibility, Pakistani Media, PEMRA, Journalistic Perspectives and Practices

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of expression and social responsibility are key concepts to ensure Journalism with responsibility. In process of news making, transparent reporting of facts without any bias should be done. Free and fair coverage of socio-political issues is possible when freedom of expression comes with social responsibility. Freedom of expression does not only give authority to express what one feels but it should be done keeping in view interest of society. Freedom of expression guarantees objectivity in news content.

Freedom of Expression in Pakistan

Receiving information regardless of any boundary is fair but it also comes along with restrictions provided by law to ensure public interest (Aswad, 2018). The opportunity of articulation is the capacity of an individual or gathering of people to communicate their convictions, considerations, thoughts, and feelings about various issues liberated from government restriction. The opportunities for assessment and articulation are free however exist together as adjuncts.

According to Article 19 of Pakistan's 1973 Constitution, everyone has the right to freedom of expression but excluding those views that are against Islam's honour, law and order and national security. (Liaquat, Qaisrani & Khokhar, 2016). It provides freedom to express an opinion within the moral framework (Ali, 2021). The most difficult faced by elected governments in the world is to

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maintain law, order, and peace and protect individuals' rights in terms of privacy and honour with the freedom of expression they acquire.

Pakistan's electronic media had been under government monopoly up to the emergence of the twenty-first century. As we are all aware Pakistan Television (PTV) and Pakistan radio, two state-owned electronic media organizations, were under government rule (Najam-u-Din, 2019). Freedom of expression recurred under General Pervez Musharraf's era. Since then diversity in media occur that expanding the realm of possible expression. Nowadays there are 100 private channels and 188 FM radios accessed by a large population of Pakistan (Mamom & Shaikh, 2019). This media expansion has raised debate on several social, cultural and political topics. (Yusuf & Shoemaker, 2013).

To control the media, numerous laws have been created and put into effect. One of these is the "Right to Information" provision of Article 19A of the 18th Constitutional Amendment (Najam-u-Din, 2019). In Pakistan, not only government alone play with media and information but a variety of players, including law enforcement, terrorists, religious academics, politicians, feudal lords, criminals, and tribal leaders, exert pressure on the media on occasion.

Social Responsibility of Media

According to the Hutchins commission on freedom of expression, serving society is the responsibility of the media but industrial and technological imperatives compromise the reporting with truth and accuracy. It should remain free and socially responsible to society. Being socially responsible news means being dutiful towards society (Christian & Nordenstreng, 2004).

Media plays a vital role in making and changing the perspectives of people. Media should avoid creating and spreading content that can stimulate hate or rage in people. Also, deal with privileged media clients that manipulate information and presented them as morally unacceptable. The basic purpose of media has shifted from providing information to marketing. Where sensational debates turned into commercialized material. Therefore, professional journalists should be socially responsible, transparent, within set moral boundaries and fearless to deliver truth. Journalism has a significant impact on a community's or country's overall quality of life. As it is a major form of public expression that offers all citizens information and guidance for forming opinions and making decisions, it is therefore a prerequisite for these ideals (Ayanfeoluwa, & Oyeyinka, 2016).

Problems of Working Journalists in Pakistan

Throughout the planet, all writers have been confronted with tough spots while fulfilling their job responsibility same goes in Pakistan. Working environment, openings, well-being, amicability, connections, association's employer stability, cutthroat pay rates, work- independence, and others are the critical problems. when they go against unethical practices and serve as truthful and responsible, they deal with consequences which are serious economic issues that lead them toward unethical practices (Qamer, Manzoor & Shahzadi 2020).

These days, media business lose their esteem and depend on economic incentives Where columnists live in disadvantageous condition and their right to articulate information or data has been stomped. Numerous writers have been killed and vanished anonymously and their pay rates are financially ill. Not only these they lose their position over spitting truth or even families and their lives too. They have been unacknowledged by associations and their independence to write has been monitored by people with money and power. Their concerns ought to be annihilated at each level so that, they might offer more to the government assistance of an average person in Pakistan. These kinds of problems not only exist in Pakistan but worldwide. Low wages, violence against journalists, work place issues, public dealings and their own personal problem all affect the ways journalist work and performance (Tendoc, 2017; Yun & Yoon, 2011; Garrison, 2000, Saeed, Hussain & Marwan, 2018).

Significance and Implications of the Study

This study is a baseline for investigating freedom of expression with social responsibility in the context of reporting and analyzing socio-political issues on news channels in Pakistan. It helps to define and understand the journalistic perspective on journalistic practices which ensure freedom of expression and social responsibility among electronic media journalists. This study is also helpful to understand the meaning of freedom of expression to journalist and how they practice it while covering to socio-political issues of Pakistan. It attempts to unfold the challenges and biases confronted by journalists in the line of their job. It also finds out the limits of media freedom and thus is helpful for media organizations to review their policy regarding media content. It can also help the government to revise the media laws and to set a more acceptable standard of coverage in Pakistan.

Objectives of the study

The study was designed to explore the journalistic perspective on freedom of expression and social responsibility among TV News Journalists with respect to socio-political issues. It also explored factors affecting freedom of expression and social responsibility.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Looking toward past literature several studies have focused on how freedom of expression diminished when it comes to the code of ethics worldwide (Laitila, 1995; Hafez, 2002; Himmelboim and Limor, 2008). Most of these studies focus on the working environment and how institutions affect journalist work (Kent, 1972; Weaver, 1977, 1985; Niazi, 1986; Hachten, 1989; Ali, 1997; Jabbar, 1997; Price, 2002; Rozumilowicz, 2002).

Freedom of expression is key to the development of a nation. It helps in gathering knowledge worldwide and open door to innovation. It also helps in eradicating social issues that hinder growth (Wilson, 2019). The Constitution of Pakistan does provide the right to express but as only formality mentioned within the law. Although we are blessed with freedom of expression it is constrained by prejudice and biased social, political and cultural structure (Qaisar & Riaz, 2020).

Pakistan's current situation is where national security and personal security have been utilized to rule again over channels and monitoring information they should provide. the framework of competitive authoritarianism, which implies that there are risks for journalists, and the state's use of various methods to restrict free speech (Jamil, 2021).

Media is the most vital component for the improvement of freedom of expression. For the development of freedom of expression, media remain always major component and Pakistan's history is filled with ridiculous policies and standards in the name of "National Interest". Multiple ordinances strangle the voice of expression such as the Press and Publication Ordinance (1963), the production of National Press Trust (1964), the Registration of Print machines and Publication Ordinance (1988) and so on. In 1999 Pakistan's media face the light of freedom under the fourth military law and that's how new advancements have been created in media. Journalism should be taken as an institutional framework as it has numerous responsibilities to highlight social political cultural economic issues not only issues but development improvement and points too. It plays the role of bridge between the public and government and present innovation requires structure so there should be the provision of freedom to media (Schudson, 1997; Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 2006; Orsten, 2008).

In Pakistan where journalist work under diminution, their role only become the reason for chaos. Where either democratic government come from the military, they are the main restrainer of media. Where journalists face safety, financial and legal issues. (Niazi, 1986; Jabbar, 1997; Ali, 1997; Riaz, 2007; Siraj, 2009; Freedom House, 2012; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012). Article 19 of the constitution of Pakistan provides freedom of expression to every individual of Pakistan but limitation does enforce in articulation when it comes to the honour of Islam or any security of Pakistan. Further law restricts hatred and prejudice criticism that create chaos and amicable relation with unfamiliar states also been highlighted within this context. Article 19- A ensures the right to data (RTI). Freedom of expression is a global concept that has been included in UDHR and ICCPR. In Pakistan, the right to opportunity of articulation and discourse had been perceived by the Constitutions of 1956 also, 1962. The Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 incorporates a particular arrangement (Article 19) on freedom of expression and discourse.

In 2002 PEMRA ordinance also restrict much private Television to freedom of speech. There was prominent development in Media made by General Pervaiz Musharaf that restricted government power to ban any publication Press Council of Pakistan Ordinance (2002) and the Press, Newspapers, News Agencies and Book Registration Ordinance (PNNABRO, 2002) (Rehmat, 2007). Social responsibility is an important factor that helps in the development of political structure in a nation like Pakistan. Although Pakistan going through strict radicalization, and illegal involvement that creates disharmony in the system. This puts media into extra responsibility where they need to discourage negative patterns and utilize their judgement and publications to create a better governance structure.

Pakistan media developed swiftly due to innovative arrangements yet they failed to provide a positive impact on the system. As there existence of areas which are uninterrupted and hold clashes with the government. Still, the media had to deal with complications and complexities not only politically but culturally, socially and religiously too as they play important role in fortifying society

(Awan, 2019). Worldwide people use media to gather the information that creates their perceptions regarding any issue country or government. Media freedom of expression does come with social responsibility as it impacts a large population. As high you get the opportunity for freedom of expression higher your responsibility increases (Almagor, 2017). As media needed to fulfil moral standards whereas the newsroom stands for media morals and had an extensive social responsibility to deal with. As their discussed topic can be positive, negative, right, or wrong regulating perspective system, therefore, social obligations fall over media (Middleton, 2009).

In Pakistan journalist face pressure apart from social responsibility they are holding but financial, social, economic, political, cultural and peer constraints that do not let them raise their voice and write the truth about the current situation. As it impacts the public which might be destructive (Shah, Ginossar & Ittefaq, 2021). Not only in Pakistan but worldwide journalists face hardship while seeking after their profession. Pakistan's situation is not different from that of above mention hurdles face by every journal in Pakistan. Until they seek not to tell truth and regulate according to the current monopoly within the country. This might cause physical and psychological wellness issues too (Qamar, et.al, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative research design has been used in this study. This research design was used to gather the opinions and perspectives of participants regarding journalistic practices. A study was focused on perspective, meaning and experiences so open-ended questions were used therefore, qualitative methodology was useful (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016).

Sample

10 individuals working in the field of electronic media and serving as analysts from different media houses were chosen for this study. For recruitment, a purposive sample technique was used. Male and female journalists who were working in TV News Channels for 5 years or more, were included in this study as a sample.

Instrument

Keeping in mind the objective of the study semi-structured questionnaire was developed using a literature review which was also helpful in generating code.

Analysis & Conclusion

Interviews were analyzed for extracting themes. The participants explained their perspective on journalistic practices of freedom of expression and social responsibility while covering socio-political issues on TV News channels. The following themes emerged.

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression was defined and described in the personal, organizational and constitutional background. Freedom of expression is a basic human right of a person according to article 19. Journalists also exercise their right to freedom of expression in their personal and professional capacities. One of the participants explained though freedom of expression is constitutional still the majority of journalists misunderstand the real meaning of the concept. One of the participants stated that

"Most of the individuals related to TV News Channels misunderstand the meaning of freedom of speech. They think that they are free to talk about institutions, persons."

Another statement was provided,

"In my opinion, the majority of journalists don't have information about Article 19. They heard about the constitution, but they did not touch the constitution book. Approx. 90% of media persons are unaware of article 19."

The difference between personal and journalistic freedom of expression was described by a participant in these words.

"In every country and society freedom of speech for journalists and citizen differs. For citizens, the constitution permits freedom of speech and freely expressing of their opinions. While journalists express freedom there comes a sense of responsibility."

Most of the participants were on the point that freedom of expression is their right, but this right should be exercised within some limits especially as Journalists are opinion makers of the masses so first, they should control their own biases and present the facts only.

"A journalist states only facts. He has the right to exercise his freedom of speech, but it should be within limits, it must have moral standards. Freedom of speech does not mean to speak whatever comes into your mind it means to state only facts without being biased."

The participant said that:

"Listen, the job of a journalist is to pass truth which is based on facts and figures. You must have freedom of speech and freedom of expression to state the facts. There is a big misconception here in Pakistan and I believe it should be cleared, which is a journalist's job is to be unbiased and to do objective reporting."

Social Responsibility

The social responsibility of TV News Journalists was the next theme. According to participants, it is the responsibility of a journalist to stay unbiased and present what is true without changing the context. According to them, most journalists are aware of their responsibility as they tend to influence the opinion of the common man. Some also argued that sometimes due to certain organizational and extra-organizational factors, journalists are pressurized to present news with some inclination that may compromise the objectivity of News.

Social responsibility was described among TV News journalists as

"It is the basic responsibility of journalists whether they are working in electronic or print media, they should not incline toward any of parties and represent the things in the given context".

Another participant added about the sense of social responsibility among TV News channel journalists as

"Most TV News Channels journalists value their social responsibility because they believe their responsible reporting can improve society."

Journalists also face pressures during their reporting like the race of Breaking News among different news channels. Journalists do not have ample time to investigate the news properly so they fail to fulfil their social responsibility.

"Since there is no training for the reporters so they don't even know about their social responsibilities. Here the reporters are pressurized to prepare their reports swiftly and to hand over those to the news channels."

Coverage of Social and Political Issues

Coverage of socio-political issues was another important theme, participants talked about. According to the Journalists, they are unable to give coverage of social and political issues. The coverage is influenced by extra organizational factors like the influence of political parties and other pressure groups. Political parties use their influence to stop news against their performance thus journalist is forced to not comply with their social responsibility. For example, a participant explained,

"When we talk about social problems, we also face difficulties, if for example there is a flood and you report the flood disasters correctly, in Sindh, government aid has not reached there, people's houses have been washed away... Instead of correcting themselves, the government will try to suppress that voice"

Another participant explained the same situation

"if we compare global media with our media, the global media covers every aspect from science to medicine to sport, education but unfortunately in our society politics is more dominant. Social issues are discussed only in a specific situation e.g., reports of faulty machinery, and protests of doctors. In our media the talk of MNA becomes headlines."

Factors Affecting the Social Responsibility of Journalists

Journalists are not practicing their social responsibility while reporting socio-political issues. Participants sum up multiple factors for this. The present journalism curriculum fails to teach a code of ethics and social responsibility to young journalism students during their student life. It seems that they are not provided with journalism workshops to introduce them to the basics of journalism. They are unaware of the constitution. They learn practical journalism from their seniors at their jobs and unfortunately, both seniors and juniors are not ready to teach and learn from each other. Seniors keep on shifting their organizations for monetary gains or due to organizational issues so they also fail to set good examples for young journalists. Organizations get influenced by political parties, pressure groups like religious groups, state institutions, government intuitions and PEMRA. At the personal level, journalists tend to use their professional influence beyond their limits, thus abusing and violating others' social repute. One of the participants mentioned that it is not a reporter who is blameworthy to social

responsibility only as they work by their duty. Other people approve and disapprove of news content and change it accordingly,

"The news controller, anchor, editor, producer, and others who organize news for the bulletin are to blame for irresponsibility. The government, media owners, and PEMRA are all to blame for this."

The contradiction between Freedom of Expression and Social Responsibility

TV News channel journalists face a contradiction between their freedom of expression and social responsibility. They have a certain pressure that hinders their exercise of social responsibility and freedom of expression. Their organizations have set some criteria for daily news coverage. They are bound to follow organizational guidelines; under this pressure, they leave their social responsibility behind. Breaking News is another phenomenon that has affected freedom of expression and social responsibility. Journalists want TRP for their channels so they ignore authentication, code of conduct and others' boundaries and privacies. Here one of the participants highlighted an important issue

"These days they have no concern with social responsibility all they care for is reporting death tolls even hindering the rescue teams. With negative effect, it also has a positive impact as it also makes general public aware of issues needed to be resolved."

One participant blamed organizational and extra organizational pressures for compromised reporting regarding socio-political issues.

"Nowadays the contradiction is pressure on journalists. it is compulsory to search for five pieces of news for each journalist. If they are unable to search this, they made news keeping in mind there should have propaganda. Different channels support different political parties. E.g., ARY supports PTI and gives minimum news of Nawaz Sharif and similarly, GEO news rarely gives coverage of PTI."

Political polarization

TV News channels are also responsible for political polarization these days. Every channel has its political affiliations and inclinations. They devise such policies that promote propaganda against a certain political party. By protecting the political interests of a specific party, they secure their existence in the industry. According to another participant, the government is also responsible for this divide as they are not ready to take criticism so they do not favour freedom of expression from media. Resultantly they support certain TV news channels that support government policies and neglect purposefully the rest. The participants said that:

"media is, and it is not responsible for political polarization as well. This should not happen but unfortunately, it is happening and on top of that the government is not taking any action. The reason behind this is simple, which is their patience level is at zero level. The government can't even bear criticism, how could it work for the rights of freedom of expression? So, neither media nor journalists are responsible, the responsible entity is the government."

Role of PEMRA

PEMRA was established as a regulatory authority to check the content of TV Channels. Initially, it was considered to be an impartial authority, but later it was observed that it is also influenced by the government. Its role was not of an independent organization. Participants mentioned that somehow it was good to have rules and regulations over private channels that restrict them from airing sensitive content or something biased about any race, religion or sex. One of the participants explained the role of PEMRA in these words

"According to the PEMRA laws and regulations, news on threats to national security and other acts of aggression are not considered news. The first restriction on the right to free expression is this. The PEMRA website has different time slots for news, but 90% of the news is focused on political issues."

PEMRA, a nondemocratic organization, operates by the laws of the existing government. The selecting procedure of the PEMRA Chairman is inappropriate."

Challenges faced by TV News Journalists

TV News channels Journalists face multiple issues. They have to comply with the organizational policies leaving freedom of expression and social responsibility behind to secure their jobs. Their financial status makes them vulnerable. They get blackmailed easily and do compromise reporting. TV channels delay the salaries of workers to pressurize workers and advertisers. So, owners act like mafia. Apart from their organizational factors, they also face pressure from political parties, religious groups and sometimes from state institutions as well.

"TV News Channels journalists have to face other challenges including pressure from employers, religious and political parties and sometimes institutional pressure for freedom of expression... Financial problems of journalists such as non-payment or timely payment of salaries and other personal reasons"

Another participant has similar views regarding it

"TV News Channels journalists encounter a variety of difficulties. In the mafia networks, the owners of media outlets are subject to the power of money, and if the owners don't take money into the account, the mafia contacts the regulatory authorities. Then it becomes impossible to abide by social responsibility"

Gender-specific challenges

The last major theme was Gender-specific issues. Females face different challenges as lack of familial support, child-rearing, and many other challenges. Media houses do not prefer to hire women journalists as they have to give comparatively more time to family.

"Look, the media industry is largely dominated by men, and many families don't accept this career path." Due to special challenges including marital problems, childrearing, and household tasks, men do not consider hiring women for this position."

CONCLUSION

Socially responsible and free media is considered the fourth pillar of the state. The media plays the role of a watchdog and keeps people aware of the world around them. Journalists have freedom of expression as per article 19 but this freedom should be exercised with social responsibility. Though a majority of journalists are aware of the definition of freedom of expression still they do not practice it in its true spirit. They face issues and challenges while performing their journalistic responsibilities. While reporting socio-political issues it becomes difficult to practice freedom of expression and social responsibility independently because of various factors. These include personal political and religious affiliations of a journalist to the vested interest of the organization underlying the political forces of the country. In addition to that political parties and religious groups use individuals and organizations to achieve their goals. Alongside these political and religious groups, state institutions and governments also enforce their certain agendas through like-mind entities within media houses including journalists to attain set targets. Resultantly the freedom of expression and social responsibility of journalists get compromised and propagate polarization in public opinion. Journalists become part of the game consciously or unconsciously due to job insecurity and financial stress. They let go objectivity of the News. freedom of expression and social responsibility seems subjective for working journalist and media organizations

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