

Political Affiliations of Journalists in Pakistan: A Potent Source of Threats to Professionalism

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Abstract

This study explores the media landscape of Pakistan for the circumstances of political affiliations of journalists and its linkage with the partisan character of journalism and also it analyses the impacts on the levels of threats to journalists. The expanding role of media in interest's promotions and in generating general opinion makes it obliging to gauge its parameters and effects on the professional standards of journalism and journalists whereas journalism in its pure nature is the free flow of information without any interference from any state or non-state agent as a sacred trust in the limits reckoned by local moralities and universal truth from its source to feedback. In this regard the in-depth exploration of media landscape by consulting the component parts of the press is the only way to get reliable conclusions. This study investigates ground realities and attempts to collect primary data in the form of perceptions and perspectives of working. For the purpose survey technique is used with a centralized questionnaire constructed under Likert's Scale and engages senior journalists in face-to-face interviews. The conclusion demarcates the partisan nature of the press and provides policy guidelines for national and international institutions in these dimensions.

Keywords: media politics, political communication, political affiliations of journalists, threats to journalists, media professionalism, media landscape of Pakistan

Introduction

Media plays magnificent role in the context of opinion making process in political makeup of democracies. Political discourses attempt to make use of all available forms of intra to inter and mass communication to create general opinion on policy criterions. Media in this milieu is the most appropriate choice to get favorable upshots. This feature is highly reflected in the history of press as well in the path way of democracy in the world including Pakistan.

Such sort of treatment with popular expression of opinion restricted the press and mass communication and democratic characteristics of polities couldn't get way to develop individual elucidation while monarchical, oligarchic and despotic attributes prevailed all around the world.

The vogue of professionalism couldn't prove long lasting and with an exception of few, most of the media conglomerates, sole enterprises and journalists bowed before the vicious use of economical, legal and political powers of state and non-state agents on

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one hand and the allure longing for money making on other (Fang, 1997).

In this context the environment of political communication, whether that is the “propaganda” for political persuasion (Lippmann, 1997) or two step flow of communication (Lazarsfeld at el. 1944) for forging the public opinion, is directed to use the available and all possible mediums to convey the desired message to the target, decently or by force and persuasion (Seibert et al. 1956).

This study attempts to explore the media landscape of Pakistan in context of non-professional and unhealthy approaches in political communication, its relation with media politics, political motives of the media and journalists and their share in the prevailing threats to journalists in the state. The study investigates working journalist as the eye witnesses of circumstances around them because the assumptions and mere analytical inferences are not the scientific search to locate the ground local realities.

Literature review

The history of political manipulation of press as a tool of communication by authorities starts with the advent of press. Acta Diurna (daily actions) in Rome, the first-hand written newspaper, Ti-Pao (the palace news) in china, the business letters and then the penny press in England were all the tools to communicate selective messages largely for the authorities (Newth, 2010, p-23).

Communication of the sort from hand written news pamphlets has entered into the age of magnetic waves after passing through printing era (Cambridge, 2005, p-12) and same happened with the ambition of political communication by the powerful elites.

The invention of printing press by Gutenberg in 1450 was primarily used for religious communication but it played its magnificent role as a technology suitable to boast conventional press (Fang, 1997; Natarajan, 1955, p-131) and that was utilized then by political activists ruthlessly which turned it adverse to the public interests.

Prolifically, this aspect has been depicted by Eijaz (2012, p-24) in her article “Articulation of political Discourse”. She concludes that media in Pakistan reflects the ideologies of advertisers and powerful actors in the government and society.

The circumstances of political communication and its integration with political and economic spheres was and is in exercise all over the world, some where it is open like in China, Saudi Arabia and other authoritarian states and societies and some where it works out behind the curtain such as in Hungary, Spain, France, Nigeria, Greece, India and Pakistan (Wetherbee, 2010; Sipos, 2013; Humanes et al. 2013; Ukonu, 2005; Kenterelidou, 2005).

The theory of Political Propaganda as envisaged by Laswell (1927, pp. 627-631), is the management of collective attitudes, monopolizing the Signs and Symbols which are significant to manifestos of political agendas. It's very important to note that Press plays important role in the opinion making for being an Agenda Setting actor. The conceptualization and lexical manipulation of information, especially the news contents, directly affect the Individual Will and General Will as in the best way was described by Hypodermic Needle Theory (p-639).

A generally held view is that the way to honesty passes through stomach, if stomach is empty there will be no honesty and in the case of journalists with low or no salary and no job security, the situation becomes drastic because that not only makes the information biased but it also diverts and indulges the public opinion and deprives the masses from their right to know truth.

This state of affairs also indoctrinates a false belief that as a reaction jeopardizes the profession of journalism and the life and property of journalists which this research attempts to locate in the context of Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This study is a basic research, employs the quantitative method of research with survey and face-to-face interviews as tools for primary data collection while explore media history for supportive secondary data as qualitative module.

The study divides the whole area within the geographical boundaries of Pakistan in five clusters i-e Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan, providing equal opportunities to the respondents.

Universe of the Study

The whole population of journalists in the country is the universe of this study which is reportedly twenty thousand. The number twenty thousand is confirmed by a number of research studies like International Media Support (IMS), The American Journalism Review (AJR) and Pakistan Press Foundation PPF.

Sampling

Two hundred working journalists, forty from each cluster are selected using Snow ball technique due to undefined population as a representative sample for the study which is the best working method for such a data (Zubairi, 2013, p-112). The sample represents the whole area of Pakistan and 1percent of the population which proves its validity and reliability for acceptable generalization.

Measuring Scale

This study takes up the Likert Scale with easy choices for close ended questionnaire which endows with centralized results and zero degree of uncertainty (Kumar et al. 2016). Rensis Likert introduced the scale in 1932 for survey research which centerlines all the possible responses of “full”, “partial”, and no or have no idea (Zubairi, 2013, p-115). The arrangement explores the unambiguous ordinarily of responses and provides with exact results acceptable for generalization.

Political Communication and Threats to Journalists

Political communication in Pakistan is a legacy of colonial era. When vernacular press became the mouth piece of freedom fighters for common cause, political communication occupied most of the printing space in print media (Iqbal, 2010). Although communication through mass media is influenced by political and religious elites in all times for framing geopolitical strategies (Baran&Davis, 2015) but the situation goes centrifuged in tensed relations between government and citizens as that was the case in pre-independence era of subcontinent under the British rule.

The adverse reaction of political affiliation of press was witnessed when angry mob in Dhaka attacked the offices of daily Dhanak Pakistan and daily Morning News on January 24, 1969. The mob was condemning the papers for their partial political stance on the issues (Munir, 2002, p-213).

In due course the offices of daily Dawn in Karachi were attacked by the activists of Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) during Nawaz Sharif’s rule and APNS was compelled to negotiate with the leader of MQM Altaf Hussain for compromise on professionalism (Khan, 2014).

Karachi press club suffered the same fate for blames on journalists in connection with political affiliation. On 6 Feb.1971, activists of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) ransacked the club (Niazi, 2006, p-213) following by Shiite activists on Feb. 29, 2004 (Dawn, 2004).

Activists of Jumat-e-Islami destroyed offices of daily Nawa-e-Waqt and daily Jang in Lahore on 23 April 1982; they also threatened journalists for dire-consequences (Iqbal Shabir, 2010).

The history of media in Pakistan in the context of media-politics relation and correlation indicates that the pattern of approach on both the sides is not based on realistic and professional imperatives but it is founded on the personal gains doctrines which create hurdles

for both the factors as well for functioning democracy and masses in general.

Research Findings and Discussion

Political affiliation of journalists

To portray the real situation of political affiliation of journalists, perceptions of working journalists is the best calculator for journalists are a part of the game which this study explores as under. The following table summarizes perceptions of sampled journalists regarding the political affiliation of journalists. The figure illustrates the results when working journalists were asked whether journalists in Pakistan have full, partial or no political affiliations.

Table 1: Frequency Table for Perceptions of Journalists (Political Affiliations of Journalists in Pakistan)

Have journalists in Pakistan political affiliation?	Frequency
Full	64
Partial	123
No affiliation	6
N= 193	
No answer= 7	
Total= 200	

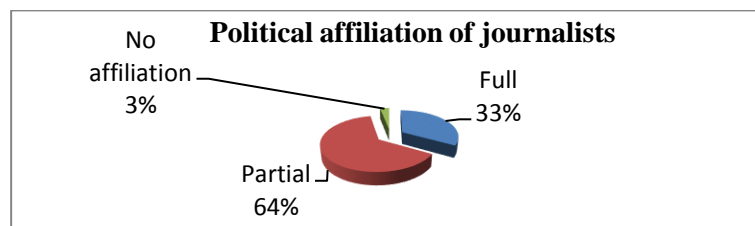


Figure 1: Percentage distribution of perceptions

Table and Figure 1 indicate that most (64%) of journalists have partial political affiliations while 33% are fully engaged with politics on the expenses of professionalism where only 3% of journalists are perceived to be professional journalists.

The findings illustrate a very extreme situation of political laid-back into media environment. It is fair to conclude that all the

media persons are working for political parties and the media is fully partisan in its nature and the colonial legacy is still in exercise.

This state of affairs is further strengthened by a report published in Pakistan Today regarding media politics in election 2018. The report says that the whole game was played through conventional media and social media when all the political invested most of their attention and resources (Wazir, 2018).

Similarly, the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued a list of 282 journalists who were secretly paid for political communication as favoritism (Dawn, 2013). This list endorses why journalists are working for political purposes.

The survey’s data inscribes the political affiliations of journalists in Pakistan as only 3% of professional working journalists are not a hoping condition for impartial and professional media that can boast democratic characteristic.

Impact of Political Affiliation of Journalists on the Objectivity of Media Content

Political game play on the shoulders of media generally affects objectivity of professional journalism and that is clearly depicted by the media history of Pakistan. It is very important to explore the ground realities about the impacts of political affiliation of journalists by consulting the working journalists. This study attempts to travel around the country and sums up perceptions of working journalists in this regard.

The following table demonstrates frequency of perceptions of working journalists as part of the scenario about the impacts of political affiliations of journalists in Pakistan. The figure illustrates the results when journalists were asked whether political affiliation affect professional objectivity of journalists fully, partially or that has no impact on the objectivity of journalist work.

Table 3: Frequency Table for the Impacts of Political Affiliations of Journalists on Objectivity

Does political affiliation of journalists affect professional objectivity?	Frequency
Fully	70
Partially	111
Doesn't affect	6
N= 187	

Total= 187	
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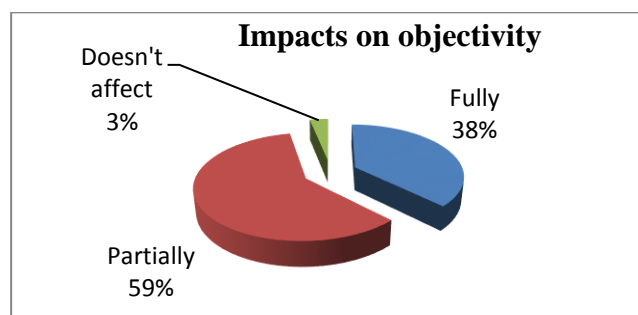


Figure 3: percentage distribution of impacts of political affiliations

Table and figure 3 show that political affiliations of journalists highly affect the objectivity of professional journalism which urges complete impartiality and tolerate no intervention in its content. The data indicates that most (59%) of journalists affirm partial impacts of political affiliations of journalists on the professional objectivity while 38% confirms full impacts whereas only 3% are of the opinion that political affiliation doesn't affect the objectivity of journalism.

It is very clear that working journalists' perspectives establish the fact that political affiliations of journalists in Pakistan badly affect the objectivity of professionalism. Perceptions of working journalists are very authentic to be generalized as confessions because they are part of the play and the media history also support the findings.

The study detects the presence of political affiliations of journalists and also depicts the impacts of such practices on the professional objectivity which makes it fair to conclude that media in Pakistan is highly partisan and partial in its content and exposure.

Impacts of Political Affiliations of Journalists on the Level of Threats to Journalists

The study empirically stipulated the presence of political affiliation and its impacts on the objectivity of the media content and also designated the concerns of state and non-state agents for political communication. All these dimensions make it easy to prescience the threats to journalists who decline the motives of such actor and upheld professionalism on the expenses of his or her life and possessions.

The following table summarizes the frequency of perceptions of sampled journalists about the share of political affiliations of journalists in the level of threats to journalists. The figure illustrates the results when journalists were asked whether political affiliations of

journalists increase threats to journalists for their professional activities fully, partially or no.

Table 5: Frequency Table for the Perceptions of Sampled Journalists (impacts of political affiliations on threats to journalists)

Does political affiliation of journalists increase threats to journalists?	Frequency
Fully	68
Partially	107
Doesn't increase threats	12
N= 187	
Total= 187	

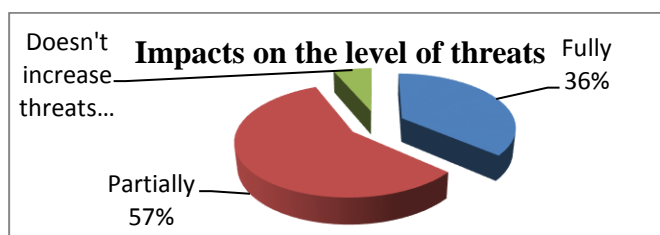


Figure 5: Percentage distribution of perceptions

Table and figure 5 indicate that political affiliations of journalists increase threats to journalists as most (57%) of the sampled journalists perceived its partial part in the level of threats to journalists while 36% of respondents affirmed that political affiliation fully increase threats whereas only 7% denoted that political affiliation of journalists have no impact on the level of threats to journalists.

Findings reveal that political affiliation of journalists put profound impacts on the security linked aspects of journalism. Journalists work for some ideologies earn agonies of the opponent groups and in case of deteriorated state of law and order, such type of practices endangers life and possessions obviously.

Conclusion

The findings prove that political communication in its rough form is in exercise in Pakistan as a colonial legacy and bitterly affects journalistic professionalism and objectivity of media content. It is also established that 97% of journalists have partial or full affiliations with political groups and ideologies. At the same time the study found that political affiliations of journalists affect the objectivity of media content up to 97%. The study also discovered that political ties of journalists increase threats to journalists by 93%. The findings also

locate the most affected regions for vulnerability to the impacts of political affiliations of journalists as Baluchistan, Sindh and Islamabad.

After exploring the media landscape for the prototype of political communication, for the bonding of journalists with political ideologies and the impacts of these exercises on the level of threats to journalists, it is fair to conclude that political ties of journalists with ideologies transmute objectivity of media content which generate threats and increase the level of threats to journalists. Similarly, the unrealistic module of political communication in Pakistan inculcates agonies and extremism for coverage which engulfs journalists and makes them more vulnerable for threats as they cordially become part of the game.

It is imperative to consider political affiliation of journalists as a significant factor for any arrangements and studies regarding legislation, policy making and measures for the improvement of media environment of the country.

Recommendations

The study locates extremism in the system of political communication and unprofessional approaches of journalists which increase threats to journalists in Pakistan. In the light of above established facts the following measures are strongly recommended to redress the problems prevailed in the media environment of the country.

1. Measurements should be taken to inculcate professionalism in the media environment of Pakistan. This can be achieved through proper training mechanism and by maintain a permanent check and balance on media through Press Council.
2. Proper mechanism for job security and salaries is very necessary to be enacted in accordance to the current standards and international market. The media houses should be abided by law to pay salaries as Wage Board asserts.
3. A permanent dialogue among the stake holders is needs to be arranged regarding the systematic manner of political communication. Participation of political leaders, religious leaders, social activists, and representatives of All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), Council of Pakistan newspaper editors (CPNE), Pakistan Broadcasting Association (PBA) and Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) is compulsory to discuss the matter that lead to affect objectivity of media content and increase threats to journalists.
4. Security arrangements should be made in respect to the journalists. In this regard not only, training is necessary but also a quick response redress forum is also needed to be founded. If journalists

feel secure, their vulnerability to threats will also be reduced and way for standard and professional journalism will be cleared.

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