In Factors Influencing a Journalist's Gatekeeping Role in the Coverage of Traumatic Incidents in Pakistan

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This research study is designed to understand reporting traumatic incidents in Pakistani media and the individual level factors that influence a journalist's decision while covering a traumatic incident and his/her decision of selecting information to include in or exclude from news. This study uses a qualitative research design to analyze the research question. The researcher used in-depth interviews with journalists in Peshawar and Tribal Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Thirty journalists were recruited (news reporters, editors and photographers) working for media (print, broadcast and online), whose primary beat is 'crime' or "violent events" along with other beats. The participants of the study were selected by purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Thematic Analysis as a method was used to analyze the data, i.e., interviews with journalists. The data was examined through the lens of the Hierarchy of Influences Model (HOI), which is an extension of the Gatekeeping Theory. The findings show that education, training, experience, focus on crime and conflict, newsworthiness of the story, self- promotion, and Job security influence a journalist's decision while covering a traumatic incident in Pakistani media.

Keywords. trauma, reporting, war, conflict, crime, Pakistan, media

This research explores the individual level factors that influence a journalist's decision while covering a traumatic incident and his/her selection information to include in or exclude from the news stories in Pakistani media. Pakistan remains one of the most dangerous countries for working journalists. As many as 119 journalists have been killed in different violent incidents in the country

between 2001 and 2019 (International Federation of Journalists, 2019). During this time period, Pakistan witnessed a rapid increase in violence. More than 70,000 people were killed in violent incidents, including terrorist attacks. Pakistan has also seen natural disasters such as the earthquake of 2005 that resulted in the killing of around 78,000 people and displacement of 2.5 million. In 2010, widespread floods displaced 20 million people from their homes. Pakistani journalists extensively covered these events. Journalists played a vital role in informing the audiences about these events by providing timely information (Disasters Emergency Committee, 2019).

Numerous research studies have found that the coverage of traumatic events negatively influence journalists' mental health; at the same time this coverage also has a negative impact on the consumers of these stories (Newhagen & Reeves, 1992). In other words, media coverage of violent incidents has negative implications for journalists as well as consumers. This situation calls for research to understand how journalists cover these violent events and find out the factors that influence their professional decisions at the level of news production. Shoemaker and Reese (2011) have identified five major factors that influence media content in Western organizations, which are i) personal or individual factors, ii) organizational factors, iii) newsroom factors, iv) ideological factors, and v) external factors. Knowing that media system and working environment vary from country to country, this paper tests Shoemaker and Reese's (2011) model to find out whether the same set of influences shape media content in Pakistan. The scope of this paper demands to investigate only personal or individual level factors.

In 2002, the President Gen. (Retired) Pervez Musharraf regime constituted the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), opening the country's airwaves to private electronic media. Today, it is one of the biggest private business sectors in the country. Currently, 88 TV channels and 227 radio channels operate in the country (Hussain, 2019). Despite the rapid growth in the Pakistani media industry, media workers face many problems such as low salaries, lack of benefits such as health or injury insurance, poor job security, and negligent professional standards (Adnan, Ali, & Aslam, 2019; Qamar, Manzoor, & Shahzadi, 2020; Shah, Ginossar, & Weiss, 2019). Since 2001, when the United States launched the so-called "war on terror" and Pakistan became its front-line ally, journalists have been targeted by both state and non-state actors (religious militant organizations) for their professional work. Journalists and media workers were attacked, and killed in many cases, with impunity, making journalism one of the most perilous professions and forcing journalists to self-censoring (Jan & Shah, 2020).

Journalists, including reporters, photographers, editors and news crew, cover tragic and violent events as part of their profession. These include war, terrorist attacks, and natural calamities (Ashraf & Jan, 2018; Shah et al., 2020). Media researchers have different opinions on what type of information journalists should include in the coverage of violent events (Barnes, 2016; Dworznik, 2006; Ellwood, 2015; Massé, 2011). Some argue that media persons have a moral and ethical responsibility not to publish terrifying, aggressive, violent, and sexual images, unless they are a necessary part of and significant for a news story (Haider, 2016). If terrifying pictures are necessary for a news story, then appropriate measures should be taken when broadcasting/publishing them. Wilkinson (1997) emphasizes that cultural and social norms and basic human values must be kept in mind while collecting and presenting information. Because professional coverage of sensitive issues, argues Peters (1995), help journalists to avoid any unpleasant effect on them and their audience. While others (Frye, 2005; Keith, Schwalbe, & Silcock, 2006; Slattery, 1994) believe that by adding

exciting details (terrifying, violent and sexual images) in the news story, the media easily gain consumers' interest. It has been used throughout history to sell papers by creating stories that will get an audience's attention. Today it is also used to gain readership, ratings and to make money.

Studies done in the context of Pakistan show that media coverage of traumatic events shows a lack of sensitivity and professionalism (Bashir, Shafiq, Arshad, & Bakht, 2020; Eijaz, Rahman, Ahmad, & Butt, 2014; Qamar et al., 2020). Showing dead bodies, injured and burned bodies, live coverage of attacks, and repeatedly broadcasting violent events have become a normal routine of the news media in Pakistan (Komal & Nosheen, 2017). Some of the news channels keep broadcasting the footages for weeks. Such practices in media have been questioned. As Haider (2016) points out media creates more and more panic in the society which affect the thinking and behaviour of the audience. Thus, watching violence and victims in the living room leads to or may cause psychological disturbance among the audience.

Empirical reports show that journalists and trauma have intimate connections, especially in reporting traumatic incidents (Dworznik, 2006). Journalists in a war zone or conflict-prone areas are vulnerable to trauma, which affect their personal life as well as their journalistic products (Shah et al., 2020). In such situations, journalists usually use different techniques to avoid trauma. But we don't know how effective these techniques are effective in coping with trauma. The case of journalists of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is vital here who have been reporting on the "war on terror" since 2001(Jan, 2015; Shah, 2018). Working under the media compulsion of journalistic routines, they have to wait at the site of occurrence for hours to cover a violent event and visit hospitals to interview the victims. Spot interviews are a vital part of reporting traumatic incidents, but the way journalists conduct interviews and frame their narration of traumatic events need scholarly attention. This study aims to understand the individual level factors that influence a journalist's decision about inclusion or omission of information in his/her report while covering a traumatic event. This study will help in understanding the complex processes involved in the coverage of traumatic events.

Literature review

A number of researchers has studied media coverage of war, terrorism and violence (Coté & Simpson, 2000; Hight & Smyth, 2002; Kawamoto, 2005; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Lohner, Banjac, & Neverla, 2016; Slone, 2000). They have identified problems faced by journalists while reporting traumatic events and their effects on the audiences. Some have found that news coverage of traumatic events has horrific effects on the audience who watch television and read newspapers (Ananthan, 2017; Lee, Ha, & Pae, 2018; MacDonald & Fox, 2018; Seely, 2019; Shah et al., 2020; Smith, Drevo, & Newman, 2018). Journalists, therefore, must continually make decisions on the use of images of the traumatic event, they suggest. Journalists have an ethical responsibility to their audience to prevent them from harm. Most newspapers and broadcasters have a code of ethics that dictates the guidelines and decisions which they make as journalists. Keith et al., (2006) conducted a content analysis of 47 U.S. codes of journalism and found that only nine codes address the issue of how to treat images of violence and tragedy. Some of these codes warn journalists to take care while displaying graphic footage of dead bodies. The codes tend to warn journalists to think carefully before showing graphic scenes of violence. Thus, few U.S. journalists work under codes of conduct that explicitly ask them to consider harm to audiences when making decisions about graphic images. Furthermore, television news reports are not rated, and thus the audience typically do not receive warnings that violent content is going to be shown.

There are well-defined codes of ethics for journalists and media outlets across the world for reporting the victims of domestic violence and social crimes. The identity, including names, photographs and other particulars of the victims, must not be revealed; family and victim who are already traumatized should not be interviewed. In Pakistani media, identity and face of the victims are revealed, their whereabouts are telecast, and their families are interviewed. This type of reporting is mainly because they do not follow any code of ethics, including the code of ethics developed by Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism (PCEJ) (Muhammad & Muqeem, 2014).

According to Christians (1989), there are several problems in the journalism profession Five practical issues dominate the media agenda: democratic participation, violence, exploitation, truth-telling and invasion of privacy. Several other researchers (Clifford, Fackler, Kim, & McKee, 2005; Day, 2005; Harcup, 2015; Retief, 2002) have identified many other ethical issues: invasion of privacy, economic pressures, conflict of interests, social responsibility, truth and deception, fairness, objectivity, accuracy, treatment of juveniles and sources.

There have been several studies exploring how journalists should ideally, ethically and professionally cover traumatic events. However, none of these studies examines the processes involved in the coverage of these events. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the factors that influence a journalist's decision of what traumatic events should they cover and what type of information should they include in or exclude from their coverage.

Theoretical Framework

The Hierarchy of Influences (HOI) model, which was developed by Shoemaker and Reese (2011) has been used in this study. The HOI model is in fact an extension of the Gatekeeping Theory of media and communication. This model brings a description to the newsgathering process by journalists in many ways that are further described below, beginning with an outline of the Gatekeeping Theory.

Gatekeeping

According to Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien (1972), gatekeeping is a process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day. Barzilai-Nahon (2008) explains that gatekeeping process includes selection, addition, repetition, shaping, integration, disregard, and deletion of information. Gatekeeping occurs at all levels of the media structure. During reporting, journalists are the ones who are often in charge of deciding which issues deserve prominent display and which issues are to be ignored. They make decisions about the news such as what facts to use, what facts to highlight in the story and what facts to skip (Foreman, 2015). Also, journalists can be driven by other factors, such as newsroom culture, sensitivities towards advertisers, pressure groups, and various other sources (Burns & Matthews, 2018). For instance, most journalists apply their particular news values to the prioritization of stories and some newspapers tend to prioritize the compelling nature of bad news over good news. Thus, constructing news is a much more complex process than a simple, linear relationship between an information producer and an informed consumer. In such a complex world of media framing, gatekeeping has been widely used as a term to describe the procedure of news selection, especially decisions regarding whether or not to allow particular news report to pass through the gates of a news medium into the news channel (McQuail, 2010).

Hierarchy of Influences Model

Hierarchy of Influences model adds details to the gatekeeping process through which news personnel filter information. It was in fact the Gatekeeping Theory which led to the formation of the HOI model. The HOI model posits that there are different levels of influence shaping news messages when information is sifted through, selected and produced as news (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996b).

The HOI model of Shoemaker and Reese identifies five major influences on media content that include: personal or individual influences, media organizational influences, influences from the newsroom, influences of ideology and influences from outside Media outlets. It is important to analysis theses influences to consider whether they have effects on reporting of traumatic events (conflict, violence and extremism) by journalists.

The HOI model has been employed as a framework to explain different levels of influences on media messages and how those influences change to shape of final news. Five levels of influence are identified that are hierarchal in nature and range from micro to macro levels: first is individual level of influence, second is routine level of influence, third, news organizational level influence, fourth, extra-media (institutional) level influence, and fifth is ideological (socio-cultural) level influence.

Relly and González de Bustamante (2014) have also used the HOI as an analytical framework in qualitative studies of influences on journalism in the context of violence in Mexico, Relly and Zanger (2017) used it in internationally-aided development of Afghanistan. The researcher finds HOI model as appropriate for this research for the following reasons. The model offers clearly outlined and widely tested framework, which explains the complex phenomenon of news production with mathematical accuracy. Its application is suited to any cultural and professional setting because of generic tools of analysis. The HOI model takes into notice cultural and other sensitivities.

Individual level factor(s)

The first level of the HOI model is the individual level factors that influence a journalist's professional behavior. The list of factors includes demographic features, such as socioeconomic status, personal traits, family values, education, training, work experience, gender, ethnicity, religious/personal beliefs and political affiliation. These factors could affect the work of a journalist at the individual level. However, research studies show that economic pressures reflect more on journalists' work in in the field. For example, researchers (e.g., Hanitzsch, et al., 2010; Reese, 2001; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) have found out in their separate studies that age, education, gender, political and religious understanding have an influence on how a journalist reports conflict, violence and extremism. Formal journalism education and specialized training influence journalists' work and their approaches to reporting traumatic events. Journalists' education background helps them in critical thinking and decision-making during reporting.

Research Question

This study is guided by the following over-arching question:
What individual-level factors influence a journalist's gatekeeping role in the coverage of traumatic incidents?

Method

This study uses a qualitative research design, specifically, thematic analysis to find out what individual level factors affects journalists' decision when they report violent incidents for their media organizations. Qualitative research enables researchers to do in-depth and broader research and to have a deeper understanding of the issue under investigation (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Data Source

To understand their understanding of reporting traumatic incidents, the researcher used in-depth interviews with journalists in Peshawar and tribal districts. Peshawar is the provincial capital of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and home to bureau offices of the national media organizations. Those journalists were selected for interview whose primary beat is 'crime' or 'traumatic events (violence, conflicts and 'war on terror')' along with other beats. From 2002 to 2015 more than 10,000 terrorist attacks were reported in Pakistan and more than half of these (5,500) took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Mahasin (2017). The "war on terror" affected almost the entire country, but Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and tribal districts were targeted more than other areas of the country.

Sampling

The researcher recruited 30 journalists (news reporters, editors and photographers) working for media (print, broadcast and online) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques, as developed by (Privitera, 2013), were used to recruit respondents The following criteria were followed for the recruitment of journalists: (1) a staff member or correspondent of a media outlet (print, broadcast, online); (2) members of press clubs that are part of Khyber Union of Journalists (KhUJ) and Tribal Union of Journalists (TUJ); (3) working as a journalist since 2001; and (4) reporting violence, conflict or war.

The reporters who met the recruitment criteria were contacted by one of the researchers. The purpose of the study was explained to the shortlisted journalists, and their verbal consent was sought. A semi-structured interview protocol was used in interaction with the respondents. The interviews were conducted and recorded in-person in Pashto and Urdu and then translated into English. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed.

A total of 30 journalists (27 males and 3 females), including news reporters, editors and photographers, were interviewed during the spring (January-February) of 2020. Nineteen were employed as reporters/correspondents; 17 were bureau chiefs; two were employed as cameramen and one photographer. Most of them worked for multiple organizations and in different roles although they regularly worked with only one organization. The names of all participants were withheld, and identification codes were given, like Participant 1, Participant 2 and so on.

Method

This study used Thematic Analysis as a method to analyze the data, i.e., interviews with journalists. Braun, Clarke, and Terry (2014) define Thematic Analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterned meanings or themes in a qualitative data. Thematic Analysis is deductive by nature, where the analysis is driven by the researcher's theoretical and analytic interests (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). The analysis is primarily done at the semantic level. During the semantic approach, the identification of the themes is limited to the explicit meaning of the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) explains that the analytic process involves a progression from description to

interpretation.

The researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. The transcription was transferred to the qualitative analysis software NVivo 10 (developed by QSR International). This study adapted the following six steps for analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006).

(1) reading the transcriptions several times and taking the initial notes;

(2) coding exciting parts of the data systematically;

(3) combining the codes generated in the second step into themes;

(4) rechecking all the themes and creating a map of themes;

(5) clearly defining the themes, and refining the themes in comparison to the overall story the data tells;

(6) analyze the themes and relate back the themes to the study's research questions and the theoretical framework or literature review.

Results

The following five themes were identified during the analysis of the data: 1) Education, training and experience influence the journalists' selection of the stories; 2) focus on crime and conflict; 3) newsworthiness of the story; 4) self- Promotion, and 5. Job security. A detailed pictorial representation of these themes is given below.

S No	Main Themes	Sub-Themes
1.	Individual-level factors influence	1. Education, Training and Experience
		2. Focus on crime and conflict
		3. Newsworthiness of the story
		4. Self-Promotion/ projection / Bravery / Professional Identity
		5. Job security

Education, Training and Experience

All the respondents agreed that education, training and experience have influence on the journalists' decision about newsworthiness of an event. Training and education help the journalist to report the events in a better way. A majority of the participants have master's degree in the subject of journalism and mass communication. But besides the formal education, a journalist needs training, which addresses the problems he/she faces while covering violent events. As Participant 20 notes,

A doctor needs training, a lawyer needs training, a police officer needs training; training is important for everyone, especially for journalists. The job of the journalist is more sensitive than that of a doctor's, a lawyer's, a police officer's and others. The main reason is the target audience, a doctor has a limited audience, a lawyer has a limited audience, but a journalist's audience is unlimited. If you are talking about terrorism, violence against women, so your story will reach many people and it will affect many people. (Participant 20)

In this excerpt, the participant draws a parallel between journalism per se and other professions which involve only interaction with people but caring for people. This also shows the burden of responsibility that journalism and journalists carry and the casual approach of media organizations toward the profession and the profession itself. It has serious implications for journalists as well as consumers of media content.

In the absence of professional training, young journalists have two options: to step unprepared into a territory uncharted for them to learn on trial-and-error basis, or to look at the work of, and toward, their seniors in the profession. As Participant 22 complains, "In the absence of training, we just follow the senior or the newsroom instructions during the coverage of those events." A cameraman with a private national television adds: "No training, just followed day by day instructions from the head office. If we get training on how to cover the "war on terror," we could cover [our beats] better" (Participant 16). Following instructions from the newsroom carry more risks for the journalist and his/her audience because newsrooms are situated away from the epicenter of conflict and war, which blinds the instructors to the reality on the ground. Thus, the journalist on the ground walks into a minefield of dangers both for him/her and the audience.

More importantly, the participants knew that those working in newsrooms and head offices also do not get any training on how to cover traumatic events. This means that an untrained crew in newsroom are more likely to put their reporters or correspondents in harm's way unknowingly. Therefore, one respondent emphasizes, "Training is also important for an organization; I mean the people in the newsrooms or the head offices. Assignment editors and NLEs. If they are trained and have the understanding of conflict reporting, we can control the harmful effects of conflict or war reporting on the audience (Participant 12).

This does not mean that journalists are insensitive to their professional work; they understand that they do it the wrong way when they cover their beats, which brings more psychological stress on them. But they have not been taught what the right way to report such events. As Participant 12 ruefully adds

> We have no training or instruction whether to show human blood or not? A person crying in pain should be put on air or not? Bomb blast survivors are interviewed by putting mics in front of their mouths. Is it right or wrong? We have committed all these mistakes, blunders. I feel very guilty the way I reported all those events and accidents during the "war on terrier" for my media organization. (Participant 12).

Similarly, an international correspondent, while sharing the story of his friend who lost his life during reporting in the tribal area, informed:

> A bomb exploded [in an area where the correspondent lived and worked] and as Azmat rushed to the spot, another blast took place in which he lost his life. We get instructions from the BBC not to rush to the spot until the police clears the sight. (Participant 28)

This shows that many international media organizations train their journalists before sending them to the warzone for reporting. While Pakistani media houses take the life and safety for granted.

Apart from training, journalists are not equipped enough, in terms of physical safety, when they rush to bomb blast scene or to a conflict-hit area. This puta them in a stressful situation as they fear for their own safety while they cannot afford not to report. As one respondent complained: "No safety kit is provided to the news staff, we just receive an order from the newsroom and head office 'we need footages' of bomb blasts, or of conflicts which put the life of journalists in danger."

(Participant 22). Many Journalists have lost their lives while reporting the conflict because they lacked safety gear while reporting conflict in tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

After 2009, different NGOs and organizations started workshops and short training sessions for journalists, but it did not suffice to save journalists from trauma. One respondent informed,

I do not attain any training which addresses specifically the coverage of traumatic events. Many trainings, which I have attended, has an ethics part which helps us to some extent. 'Change the name, blurry the faces' etc. are the takeaways from these trainings. (Participant 4).

This shows that when trainings are arranged for journalists, they focus mostly on technical and ethical aspects of conflict reporting. Physical and psychological safety of journalists and their audience are altogether ignored, which leaves media workers and their content consumers vulnerable to traumatic effects of reporting war, conflict and other violence.

Focus on Crime and Conflict

Almost all participants believed that national and international media organizations were only interested in the coverage of crime, conflicts and terrorism-related issues; sports, education, culture, politics and health reports do not get proper space or airtime. Participant 12, who has worked for different types of media, including print, web and television—both national and international media—narrated: "Only conflict and terrorism stories from our areas get space in national and international media. While stories of development and human-interest are hardly covered."

There is a long timeline of traumatic events in the north-west of Pakistan. Ethnic, tribal and sectarian conflicts and especially after 9/11, the "war on terror," militancy, military operations and internal displacement of the people. Participant 19, a journalist working with an international media organization, while reporting on the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, narrated: "The word trauma is well known for journalists working in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (including tribal Areas) because they face such events which are both traumatic for the audience as well as journalists. They reported different events but limited to conflicts and terrorism only." Reporting conflict, war and violence make journalists blind to other events which was equally important to cover but carries no blood. Covering more violence becomes a barometer to gauge the stature and professional identity of a journalist. Thus, journalists lose sense of events other than conflict or violence.

Newsworthy/Newsworthiness

The stories which generate conflict, emotion and extremism are considered newsworthy. Traumatic events, including war, conflict and violence, are more newsworthy because these are dramatic, carry impact and attract a large audience. These stories get high rating for media. Therefore, these stories are more newsworthy. For example, "We think that showing more blood ensures high rating and more business. Media owners need a story to sell. They are interested in stories of violence, conflict and war, and dead bodies, because blood increases the rating of media organizations." (Participant 5)

Participant 15 shared, "We show footage of the injured. We film dead bodies, people mourning and grieving. We think it is newsworthy. It would attract more audience, but it disturbed

and traumatised the audience and we the journalists." The participants agree that Pakistani media run live transmissions of 3 to 4 hours even after a bomb blast. Those transmissions create stress and pain in the society. "In live coverage, we show dead bodies and blood. Normally, we do not cover follow up stories in daily routine, but if there is any bomb blast, we cover the story for days, continuously showing the sad faces of the victims and their families. Journalists think that it increases the rating of the news channel."

All the participants pointed out that the audience plays a major role in news coverage and what angle the news story will have. Each organization as well as an individual journalist will always take the public into consideration as the role of the journalist is to provide public service. A journalist does not just believe that their work is for "themselves" or "you the reader" but for everyone"

One of the participants opined, "Generally, media has no control on live coverage of any event. But when we share the recording or footage of the event, then we have time to apply the filter, such as to delete or blur violent scend. However Pakistani media show it to the audience. If one channel decides to broadcast these events and we do not, still, the audience will watch the accidents". (Participant 19).

Self-Promotion/projection/Bravery/Professional Identity

All the participants agreed that there is an unspoken code of bravery that is to be followed in every situation. Journalists who report the "war on terror" and local conflicts also seemed to do so out of a spirit of fierce competition. They were dedicated to record the best footages, captures the best pictures, sharing fastest to do so, and through the process, most felt a sort of "high," especially when high-ups (editor and owner) were happy with the coverage.

No less than 21 participants also agreed that journalists are happy to share their stories, and footages. Participant 24 adds: "They feel proud when their reports on accidents gets high rating, more time and going live for 30 minutes". Participant 5 agrees with Participant 24 and shares her feeling: "I am going live, people will watch me, and the audience will like me. My television channel is also interested when I tell the story for 15 minutes directly without a break." They also agreed that any journalists who has more violent and disturbing story or footage is considered the best journalist.

> When a bomb hits everyone is in a hurry to break the news and share the
> footage. In the beginning, I had no idea what I was doing is ethically correct or
> not, what to show and what not to show. Anyone who had more violent and
> disturbing material was considered the best journalists, reporter and
> photographer or cameraman. (Participant 6).

Job security

All the participants agreed that they just fulfil the demand of media owners in order to secure their job and earn a livelihood for their family. Government and media owners are responsible for all these mistakes done by journalists during reporting traumatic events. Participant 24 working with a national media is of the opinion:

> "There is no ethical reporting of trauma accidents in Pakistani media. In some
> parts, the media is more responsible but I blame media owners, media
> managers, government institutions because they don't stop journalists, they

encourage or force them to report irresponsibly. High rating improves business, which leads to more publicity."

In Pakistan, media owners and government and its institutions must decide, what to report and how to report. Media workers have no say in the whole news process. If a journalist refuses to cover these events, they will lose their job. Thus, job security is also one of the major factors that face journalists and their audience with physical and psychological threats.

Discussion

This study was created to gain a better understanding of the process of covering traumatic events by journalists. There are many internal and external factors which influence the ways a journalist covers certain news stories and takes decision while covering these stories. A majority of the available literature is about what factors are present within the journalism profession that influence the practice of journalism. It was essential to collect data from experts in the broadcast radio, broadcast television and news-editorial fields regarding their personal insight and experiences of factors that they believe influence them and other journalists.

This study was designed to test the HOI Model developed by Shoemaker and Reese (2011) whether the same individual level factors influence decision-making process of journalists in Pakistan, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, when they cover traumatic events in Pakistani media. The HOI model suggests that personal beliefs, attitudes, formal/informal education and training are the individual factors that influence news content. These factors also influence how and why journalists report the news (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). In our research, we found that these factors play a significant role in journalists' decision whether and how to report a news story about war, conflict, crime and terrorism. However, our study shows that apart from the HOI model, one other factor also has a significant effect on journalists, which is job security. Journalists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in order not to lose their job, report events that otherwise they would avoid. This study's results reveal that a majority of journalists has a master's degree in the subject of Journalism and Mass Communication. However, most of them think that besides formal education, they need further training to learn the problems they face during the coverage of such events. Before 2009, journalist did not get any training on how to cover traumatic events, how to interview victims and how to protect themself while covering of conflicts and the "war on terror". No basic guidelines for safety were there. After 2009, different NGOs and organizations started workshops and training for journalists. Unfortunately, it did not help because it failed to understand what was needed or required. Some of big media organizations also conducted small training sessions for their staff members, some of the journalists got regular training from their respective organizations, but violent events have high intensity, are continuous and stay for long. Therefore, short training is not effective in saving journalists and media consumers from negative effects of covering traumatic events. Journalists just follow what senior journalists do. They get instructions either from the newsroom or head offices during the coverage of traumatic events.

Broadcast media in Pakistan is new and journalists are less experienced. Production teams are not professional by qualification or training. These journalists have more experience in print media, while television is a new medium for them. Those sitting in newsrooms and head offices also have no training on how to cover traumatic events. Training professionals who make editorial decisions such as assignment editors and NLE can help in their understanding to control trauma effects of conflict or violence reporting on journalists and their audience.

This study has presented literature that posits that journalists are socialized to select news stories that media organizations are likely to purchase in the case of Pakistan, which media organizations ask for. Participants of the study agreed that they just fulfil the demands of their 'high-ups,' which refers to media owners and those sitting in head offices away from the ground zero. It is the game of high ratings, and breaking news culture which have ignored the ethics of conflict or violence reporting. Journalists in this study feel remorseful, the way they have been reporting those events and accidents, especially during the "war on terror." No doubt that the audience will take interest in what is shown to them, but the responsibility lies on the media to make sensible and ethical choices while reporting such events. All the participants agree that the most important news value was the high number of death toll in any traumatic events. The high number of deaths increases the audience attention to the media, which, in turn, increases the rating and business of the news organization.

Practical contributions

This study revealed that there are three reasons behind mishandling/misreporting of traumatic events: One, government and media have no idea how to handle traumatic events' reporting; two, journalists lack training on how to report such events in a way to save themselves and their audience from the negative effects of traumatic events; and third, lack of trained and qualified professionals in newsrooms and head offices, which in almost all cases are located in cities far away from conflict zones. The study also shows that media owners and state institution decide what to report and how to report, while media workers have no say in the whole news process.

Theoretical contributions

The findings are significant because they present a pragmatic and conceptual importance of the theory of Gatekeeping (White, 1950; Shoemaker, 1991) and the Hierarchy of Influences model (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996a). By looking at the phenomena through the lens of theory, this study was able to explain aspects of traumatic events' coverage by Pakistani journalists. This study slightly refined HOI and gatekeeping theory so that they can be better applied to research about journalists and reporting of traumatic events. This study adds to the literature that explores the phenomena of journalists and provides support to theoretical perspectives by examining macro and micro forces that influence the coverage of traumatic events. Specifically, there is a lack of literature in the field about Pakistani journalists and how they operate in war/conflict zone.

Limitations

The researcher used purposive and snowball sampling techniques for the recruitment of participants. Therefore, the results of this study are limited in generalizability. Second limitation of this study was just based on the perceptions of journalists about the factors that influence journalists' coverage of traumatic events in Pakistani Media, the study did not look at the Media contents broadcasted or shared with audience. Another limitation of the study is the researcher used in-depth interviews. It is also important to recognize that the researcher is an interpreter of the data. While this researcher presented the words of the participants as they were spoken or written, the researcher cannot always know the meaning of the words.

Future Research

 This research study looked at the individual level factors that influence a journalist's decision while covering a traumatic incident in Pakistani media. Future research should be expanded to explore what other factors influence journalist's decision while reporting traumatic events. To do

so, future research should collect data from editors and media owners and explore what other factors influence journalists' decision when they cover news stories about violent events.

Recommendations

Journalists should be provided protective gears and training on working in hostile environment. The researchers strongly recommend that there is a need for the media organizations to train their newsroom staff and editors which will improve the news making process. It is also recommended that there is no need for live coverage of traumatic events. Making a short video of the accident, properly edited and then broadcasted for the viewers would be more appropriate.

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