

Effects of Economic Issues on Journalists' Ethical Practices in Pakistan

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Abstract

Journalism and responsible press are considered the fourth pillar of state. Journalists are expected to perform truthful, responsible, objective and ethical journalism. However, political economy of media suggests that political and economic elites use media for their interests. Politicians and owners exploit working journalists. Journalists are not well paid and they are enforced to do unethical practices. The objectives of present study are to explore the journalists' economic issues at Gujranwala (A city of Punjab, Pakistan) and their relationship with ethical practices of journalists. Data was collected through in-depth interviews of 13 working journalists of Gujranwala city. Findings revealed that journalists are facing serious economic issues and these issues are leading them towards unethical practices. Findings imply that government, judiciary, NGOs and journalistic bodies should play an effective role for overcoming this alarming situation.

Keywords: Journalists' Issues, Economic Pressures, Ethical Journalism, Political Economy

Introduction

Journalism is considered as a missionary profession. However, in under developed countries, it is facing serious problems. In Pakistan, local journalism has also critical issues. Journalists in the world are often forced self-censoring by power players, including; politicians, publishers, advertisers and other pressure groups. Therefore, journalists feel fear for losing their jobs and they move towards self-censoring practices (Yesil, 2014). Similar issues are also found in journalism of Pakistan.

Official facts and figures tell us that periodicals as well as newspapers in Pakistan are decreasing day by day (Ejaz, Rahman, Ahmad, & Butt, 2014). This factor is increasing the economic pressures on journalists. Moreover, Riaz (2015) noted that the rural

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journalists and correspondents are neither facilitated by their media organizations, nor supported by the government. Memon (2015) noted that the various means to deter the news workers to work freely include threats, arrests, torture, job insecurity and feudal influence, particularly in rural areas. All these factors are accelerating the economic problems of local journalists. The focus of present study is also highlighting the economic problems of Gujranwala journalists.

These ethical issues include different kinds of topics to cover, accuracy, truthfulness, impartiality, fairness and the respect of individual's privacy (Raza & Akbar, 2013). Waqar (2002) argued, due to the rating race, Pakistani media often indulges in sensational, controversial, and negative information. Profit orientations remain the major motive behind the participatory journalism practice (Vujnovic et al., 2010). Therefore, Local Journalists heavily rely on political and industrial public relations sources for keeping alive their circulation and profit (Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008). All these factors are effecting the ethical practices of journalists. Pakistan Press Foundation (2015) urged journalists to follow ethics. It shows that there are serious concerns for ethical journalism in Pakistan. Therefore, present study aims to explore the effects of economic pressures on ethical journalism of Gujranwala.

As concern of journalists' problems, journalistic bodies role is also not much effective. Paracha and Tahir (2012) examine the institutional role of the All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS). They found that the organization seems apparently working for safeguard journalists' rights. It is only performing its role against government taxes. Organization members, large media houses are also engage in economic exploitation of their working journalists.

Female journalists' participation is also critical in Pakistan. Female working journalists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are facing serious threats and pressures. They are often unable to do justice to their profession and portray the real picture of the issues that they cover (Shabir, 2012). According to Women Media Centre (2009) women in Pakistan are now joining profession of journalism without any hesitation. Their families are also supporting them. However, there is a need for proper training for women journalists for attaining the objectives of productive and responsible journalism.

Political Economy of Media

The term has a 'critical' signification in media research. It is often associated with macro-questions of media control, along with other

factors that bring together media industries with other media and industries, and with political, economic and social elites (Baran & Davis, 2010). It commonly looks at processes of consolidation, diversification, commercialization, the working of the profit motive in the hunt for audience and or for advertising and its consequences for media practices and media content (Boyd-Barret, 1995, McQuail, 2010).

McChesney (2003) focused on the political economy factors of American journalism. He stated, "the reasons for lousy journalism stem not from morally bankrupt or untalented journalists, but from a structure that makes such journalism the rational result of its operations." The media industries today stand at the center of our economy, politics, culture, and everyday life (Kellner, 2016). Political economy of media explains the production process and ethical practices of journalism. It seems a helpful approach for exploring the link of economics, politics and journalism.

Objectives of Study

Followings are the objectives of study.

- To explore the economic pressures on Gujranwala journalists.
- To examine the ethical problems in Gujranwala journalism
- To highlight the relationship of economic pressures and ethical journalism in Gujranwala.

Research Questions

Followings are the research questions of study.

1. What are the major issues of Gujranwala journalists?
2. To what extent ethical journalism is being practiced in Gujranwala?
3. To what extent, economic pressures lead journalists towards unethical practices?

Methodology

Present study is exploratory in nature. Therefore, it used qualitative research design for achieving the research goals. In-depth interview method was employed. Data was collected from 13 working journalists of Gujranwala city. Respondents were accessed personally. Proper permission was taken before starting interview. They were introduced about the topic, and they were granted right to withdraw from interview at any stage. Respondents were also ensured about confidentiality of information. Average time of interview was recorded 25 to 30 minutes. After data collection, thematic analysis was performed.

Definitions of Regional or Local Terms

“Dehari Bazi” دیہاڑی بازی	A term is used for “daily wagers”. It is common in journalism, the most of journalists in Pakistan, earn through daily wages by exploiting, blackmailing others on daily basis.
“Lifafa journalism” لفافہ صحافت	In English “envelop journalism”, In the context of Pakistan, it signifies the bribery in journalism.
“Toutism”	In Pakistani journalism, “tout” as a middle man between public and government institutions, for any related task. Journalists also have become “tout” and get money from public for helping them.
Bradarism برادرزم	In English, “caste system”.

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was developed. Firstly, questions about demographic detail of respondent were asked. Secondly, 13 question items were designed. Questions were about; interest in journalism, perception about Gujranwala journalism, issues in local journalism, economic issues in local journalism, ethical issues of journalism, relationship of economic issues and ethical issues, and suggestions for improvement.

Results

Demography of Respondents

All 13 journalists were male, because only two females were found employed in Gujranwala. But their Bureau Chief did not allow researcher to access them. Most of the journalists were found middle aged ($M=40.69$, $SD=13.02$). All were well experienced journalists, having years of working experience ($Min=5$, $Max=40$, $M=18.92$, $SD=9.08$). There were 5 journalists from print media and 8 journalists from electronic media who were interviewed.

Journalists include; Cameraman, Reporter, Bureau Chief, Editor, Sub-editor, Non-linear editor, and column writer. Most of the journalists were found educated. Some journalists were also found engaged in MPhil Communication Studies (Table 1).

Table 1:Education of Journalists

	Frequency	Percent
10 Year	2	15.4
12 Year	1	7.7
14 Year	3	23.1
16 Year	4	30.8
16 Above	3	23.1
Total	13	100.0

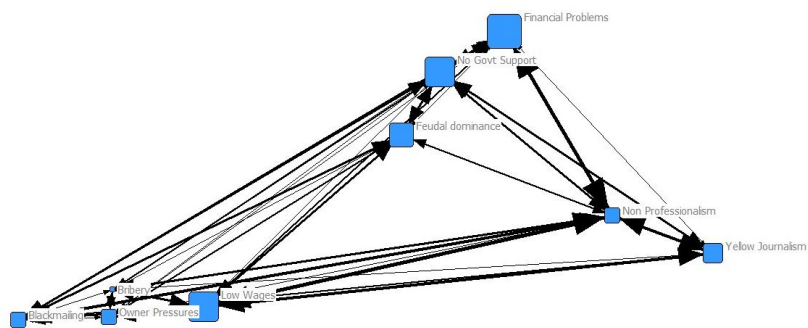
After data collection, themes categories were developed inductively (Table 2). Most of the journalists talked about the low wages, financial problems of journalists. And they also associated these issues with yellow journalism, unethical journalism and blackmailing. Figure 1 highlights that low wages are very closely interlinked with owner pressures, bribery and blackmailing. It presents that owner ideological factors are exploiting journalists, and leading them towards unethical journalism. Secondly, figure 1 shows that non-professionalism is nearly linked to yellow journalism. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the major reason of yellow journalism are non-professional journalists. Lastly, figure reveals that financial problems are majorly caused by feudal domination and lack of government support.

Table 2:Inductively developed Thematic Categories

Category	Thematic Category	Key Terms
Economic Pressures		
	Lack of Government Support	No pension, No registration, No license, No residence, No facilities, No criteria for journalism, Judiciary role
	Financial Problems	difficult to manage expenditures, no handsome earnings
	Feudal dominance	Bureau Chief Hegemony, family Journalism, Industrialists Owner, Political Influences
	Low Wages	No Salary, or Minimal Salary, no TA/DA, No overtime payment.
	Owner Pressures	Advertisements demands, Marketing pressures, breaking pressures, rating pressures.

Ethical Issues		
	Yellow Journalism	Distorting facts, Conceal truth, sensationalism, invade privacy
	Non Professionalism	No proper education, No experience, no previous background of journalism, blackmailers, political elites, industrialists
	Blackmailing	Threatening gentle persons, the poor, demanding money, “dehari baz” “toutism”
	Bribery	Selling news, deal of money for personal projections, “lifafa journalism”

Figure 1: Thematic Categories and their associations



Note: Element size represents frequency of element, lines darkness shows association strength, and closeness of elements shows inter-linkage of themes.

One of the journalistssaid, “80% working journalists are non-paid journalists”. Another journalist said, “There are more than 2000 journalists in Gujranwala, out of which only 250 are registered in Press club”. Journalists told that bureau offices are sold. Every bureau further appoints non-paid workers, and these workers are then motivated towards unethical journalism due to their financial problems.

A young journalist, having M.Phil degree in Mass Communication, said that he was only getting Rs.10000 pay, which was not sufficient for his family. He raised questions on media owners and government agencies that how he can manage his wife, his children, and his monthly expenditures in this limited income. Another journalist, who was

working in a famous newspaper for last 20 years, said that journalists do “lifafa journalism” due to their financial reasons. Moreover, Bureau offices, local politicians and industrialists are also exploiting journalists.

Another thing was also found that there is strong influence of politics and Caste Systems “bradarism” in journalism of Gujranwala. A working journalist said that 5 big media offices’ bureau chief belong to one same caste. Moreover, one famous media house bureau chief is under-Matric, and not a professional journalist, but he was appointed as bureau chief due to the relation with the Minister in the Government.

A cameraman said, “Industrialists and businessmen are publishing newspapers just for the sake of power, and money. And they are selling their press cards without any check and balance.” A senior journalist said, “There is criteria for every profession, but there is no criteria for politics and journalism. Everyone is doing journalism without any registration, license and any permission.” Journalistic bodies were also criticized for their poor performance in safeguarding journalists’ problems.

One journalist blamed judiciary for yellow journalism. He said “There are more than 400 petitions in session court Gujranwala against a “newspaper” about blackmailing, defamation and corruption. But not a single petition was decided yet”. Judiciary should also perform for ethical journalism. Gujranwala is second largest division of Punjab, yet its press club was established in 2015. One journalist blamed so-called journalists unions for promoting yellow journalism. He said that most of members of Press Club are Industrialists, the major reason to exploit their working journalists.

Discussion

Journalism was once considered a mission. In Pakistan movement, its role cannot be under estimated. Now, the situation has become vice versa. This mission has been adopted as a business. At local level of Gujranwala, lack of government support, financial problems, low wages, feudal dominance and owners’ pressures for marketing, profit making, are the major issues of journalists (Table 2). Low wages, financial problems, and lack of government support were much emphasized by the journalists (Figure 1). Journalists are not paid well; they are not paid for overtime. These are the major economic concerns of local journalists as it was noted by Riaz (2015) in rural areas. Present study finds this phenomenon in one of the biggest city of Punjab i.e.. Gujranwala.

Furthermore, bureau chief hegemony, industrialist owners, and political elites' influence are also the major problems of local journalists. As it is previously argued that journalism in Pakistan is still suffering a lot from political and economic pressures (Memon, 2015). These findings provide sufficient answer of RQ1. In this way, study indicates that journalism and press at grass root level, is not flourishing. It is causing disrupt in journalism profession. Freedom of press becomes a nightmare at grass root level in Pakistan, specifically at Gujranwala.

Study further finds out that ethical journalism is not much more practicing in Gujranwala. Yellow journalism, blackmailing, bribery, "dehari bazi" "lifafa journalism" non-professionalism, and profit making has become the central to journalistic practices (Table 2). Journalists are taking envelopes of money from government and private organizations for restricting their corruption and negative aspects to publish in newspapers. Majority of non-professional persons, like industrialists, and political workers have become journalists just for the sake of power and money. Beat reporters has become tout of that particular department or organization. For example, crime reporter is involved in making money by performing the role of middle man between police and criminals. Therefore, study finds out support for previous assumptions about unethical journalism in Pakistan (Pakistan Press Foundation, 2015; Raza & Akbar, 2013).

All these findings provide sufficient answer to RQ2. It is very alarming situation for the development of journalism at specific and society at large. Policy makers must strive hard to overcome these problems in journalism at priority basis. Moreover, female participation in journalism is very low at local level. Efforts should be made to promote gender equality at grass root level journalism.

The major focus of this study was to explore the relationships of journalists' economic issues and ethical journalism. Concept of political economy suggests that media has become industry and political, economic elites used media for their interests (Baran & Davis, 2010; Boyd-Barrett, 1995; McQuail, 2010). Findings of the study highlight that lack of government support, feudal dominance and financial problems are closely associated (Figure 1). It is argued that political and economic elites are the major reason for financial problems of journalists. Political economy of media is also prevailing at micro-level. Gujranwala local journalism provides evidence for the political economy of media. Due to political-economic elites' influences, and profit orientation, non-professionalism is extending in Gujranwala journalism. This trend leads towards yellow journalism (figure 5).

Although, majority of journalists claimed that yellow journalism is prevailing in Gujranwala, but there also exists some professional journalists who are doing ethical journalism. Yellow journalism was mostly associated with non-professional journalism. Non-professionalism is the production of political-economic elites. Furthermore, study found close connections among low wages, bribery, blackmailing and owner influences (Figure 1).

Findings of study provide enormous support for answering RQ3 that there is a close connection of economic pressures on journalists and their ethical practices. The situation is not good for the media development in Pakistan. Not only government, but journalistic bodies should also focus to combat these economic constraints of journalism. In this way, a positive change can be brought into journalism at grass-root level. Economic problems and non-professional journalists should be restricted through careful monitoring, scrutiny, and proper registration of journalists, either by the Government or by Journalistic bodies. Judiciary should also perform active role in accountability of "yellow journalists".

Conclusion

Journalism in Pakistan is passing through critical phases at grass root level. Gujranwala journalists are facing serious economic issues. These issues include; financial problems, no salary, or minimal salary, no TA/DA, no overtime payment, no pension, no registration system, no license system, no residence, no facilities, no criteria for journalism, bureau chief hegemony, family journalism, industrialists owner, political influences, marketing pressures, and rating pressures. These issues are leading journalism towards; yellow journalism, Distorting facts, Conceal truth, sensationalism, invading privacy, non-professionalism, 'lifafa journalism', 'dehari journalism', 'toutism', blackmailing, and bribery. Government, judiciary and journalistic bodies should perform an active and effective role for overcoming this alarming situation.

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