

BBC News Story on India funding of MQM: Understanding Expats Perception of Pakistani and Indian Nationalities in the Sultanate of Oman

Khalid Sultan* & Inam ur Rahman**

Abstract

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News reported that Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) a political party from Pakistan has been getting funding from Indian's secret agency Research and Analytical Wing (RAW). It has received a considerable media attention in Pakistan. The same has been down played by the Indian national media. The behavior and approach adopted by the Indo-Pak media on BBC's news seemingly reflect the journalistic nationalism. This paper is an attempt to address the issue from the perspective presented on the Indian funding of MQM by the BBC news with particular focus on its coverage, credibility, perception and bias viz-a-viz journalistic nationalism in their respective media. Results and statistical analysis revealed differences between the trend followed by the respective national media and perceptions of this coverage among the highly educated expats of Indo-Pak nationalities residing in the Sultanate of Oman. The relationship has been significantly high in areas like awareness of news report regarding funds provided to MQM by India ($x^2=.000$), source of awareness of BBC news report ($x^2=.000$), credibility of BBC as a news channel ($x^2=.001$) and the trend followed by the respective national media with regard to the BBC news ($x^2=.000$).

Keywords: news, framing, perception, bias, journalistic nationalism

Introduction

Mass media plays an important role in today's world. It sets the stage for media agenda, political news, control the information and sources. It functions as a gate keeper to the outside world capable to shape predictable behavior, attitude, norms, culture and pattern. It determines what people purchase, what people desire for and what they dreamed to become. It shapes how people conduct their day-to-day lives, even their sexual behavior (Sultan, 2008; Devaney, 2013). The mass media being the fourth pillar of the state constitutes the backbone of democracy enjoys enormous power but remain literally free of external control, and so are abusing their power (Ericson et al. 1989). Because of power and variety of options, mass media industry owners, controllers, professionals and other content producers are focusing on how to tie together the audiences for their

* Head, Mass Communication Department, College of Applied Sciences, Nizwa Ministry of Higher Education, Sultanate of Oman.

** Lecturer, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Peshawar, Pakistan.

particular media consumption. In this process of audience's construction several sociologists have studied how different topics compete for the media attention (McManus, 1995). All this paved the way for the audiences to have a variety of choices and mediums to access mass media products, from the personalized feeds to the newspapers, radio, TV, Internet and old-style gate keeping of broadcast media to the recommendations of crowds and their friends (Schackman, 2013). In the Indo-Pak perspective, both the countries are amongst the top 10 markets¹ for BBC's international news service (Weekly Global Audience Measure, 2016). Because of the leading sources of mass media and the absence of responsible and free national media the role of BBC is more active in the Indo-Pak context.² According to the latest statistics on BBC, the combined global audience reaches at 348 million (Weekly Global Audience Measure, 2016). Owing to such a significant exposure BBC like other mass media at times shape contents and sets a media agenda particularly when it comes to news. The news production on the other hand is not a process that manufactured in vacuum. Often journalists tend to pick a particular angle and tilt so that they focus on one aspect of what is considered vital, rather than many others. It is the construction of narrative that determines what is available for consumption (Phillips 2015). This powerful and dominant role as of 'watch dog' the news media justifies a lot of the hype associated with the debate of media bias (Devaney 2013). A significant literature is available that describe how a news content is mediated at successive screening and get filtered from the reporter up to the sub-editor, news editor, owner, control, media concentration, corporations having market pressures, dominant discourses and state to fit it as a final residue (Shoemaker, 1996; Curran, 2003; Mullen, 2010; Zandberg, 2012). These influences, pressures and constraints that force the media to gravitate to the center of power are from but not limited to the patter of media contents that serve the dominant elite, influences on content from individual media workers, influences of media routine, organizational influences on content, influences on content from outside media organization and the influence of ideology, state censorship, corporate ownership, advertising influence, media regulations (Shoemaker, 1996; Curran, 2003). In addition the flow of news to the news rooms have passed through the filters of European or American media men before it arrives at its destination (Thussu, 2000). Such ideological approaches are operationalized by framing as it effectively internalized as the 'dominant view' (Hallin, 1986). The journalists, correspondents, reporters, editors, and other mass media-content producers select materials and facts, insert them in cultural list of frames and bestow meaning. Apparently journalists "lean on" the past in order to infuse understanding into present events (Meyers, 2007; Meyers, Neiger & Zandberg, 2011). In newsrooms, framing manifests encoding ideological assumptions by prioritizing certain facts over other. As pointed out by Phillips (2015) in quotes as;

"There is no objective matter that can be described as 'news'. The stories that end up on the pages and in the bulletins don't arrive there by chance but

¹ Top 10 markets for BBC's international news services are the US (35m); Nigeria (35m); India (23m); Pakistan (13m); Iran (12m); Egypt (11m); Tanzania (10m); Brazil (8m); Afghanistan (7m); Bangladesh (6m).

² This was revealed at the focus group discussion attended by the academic staff of mass communication department, COAS, Nizwa, Ministry of Higher Education, Sultanate of Oman.

through a set of decisions constrained by practical, structural and ideological factors. Some decisions are taken because of time constraints and other because access is limited. But while these practical constraints are clearly important, there are also deeper questions of culture, ideology and power, which underline which events in the world journalists choose to select and amplify” (Phillips 2015, p.5).

Due to this particular factor the national media operating in Pakistan and India are treating the BBC news coverage of Indian funding of MQM differently. Journalistic nationalism is seemingly being used as a front line strategy as partisan news audiences is a global reality. When it comes to the state interest, it is more visible. In the context of Pakistan this particular news of BBC has gained a top place in the media agenda usually highlighting, glorifying and playing it up where as in the case of India the marginalizing, sidelining and playing it down scheme has been adopted and hence becomes less objective portraying a mediated version of the news story. Objectivity as the core tenant of journalistic professionalism has now become the target of unremitting attack by critics of academics and news journalism (Hammond, 2014). In the case of BBC while understanding fault lines in journalistic ideologies Frost et al. (2011) considered the BBC—one of the respected world institutions till recently. According to him and his associates the BBC's journalists face an ethical dilemma rooted in the conflicting ideologies whenever they are reporting contentious and complex areas where issues of foreign policy, law, domestic, civil rights, traditions and culture collide. Frost and his associates outlines this and in quotes as;

"The core values of the BBC are in line with the normative ideological ideals of Western liberalism: 'individual reason, personal liberty and autonomy, the existence and necessity of civil society, with an informed citizenry, civic responsibility, parliamentary representation, ethic, cultural and religious pluralism, and public debate'; but it seems there is an ethical paradox at the heart of this renowned international organization (Frost et al. 2011).

The News Report

News reports of the BBC since June, 2015 that MQM has been receiving funding from Indian authorities (Dawn, 2015; First post, 2015 and Indian Express, 2015; Bennett-Jones, 2016) has further been seconded by the Britain's former diplomat saying that MQM founder leader Altaf Hussain worked for Indian Spy Agency RAW (Internews, 2016). It further stated that India has trained hundreds of MQM militants in explosives, weapons and sabotage over the last 10 years in camps in north and north-east India has evoked a new debate in Pakistan amid heavy coverage in the main stream national media of Pakistan. Media contents are fueling the impression that India is financing terrorism in Pakistan as political party and terror connections are not a new phenomenon. Linkages between terrorist group and political party remains in its infancy, again there is a solid foundation upon which to build (Martin, 2012). On the other hand, Indian main stream media is not giving a considerable time and space to the issue. The different version on the issue is no doubt a result of ideology and the news as there is no objective matter that

can be called as 'news'. The stories that appeared on the media as news do not arrive by chance but through a series of decisions guarded by ideological, practical and structural factors (Phillips, 2015).

Background

There is a continuous long oral tradition in story-telling, news-telling and journalism. With the growth of mass media and improved technology the traditional monopolies of church and monarch had been taken over by knowledge and power hence created a greater divide—to 'tell' the news and those the 'passive receivers' (Patching, 2014). Today society is saturated by media of different forms, shapes, and sizes and every day the average citizen spends a large amount of his or her time in the consumption of media products, whether as readers, listeners, or viewers (Winnail, 2003; Focus Group Discussion, 2016). Mass media dominance in our lives has led users to attribute the media for a range of social ills (Price, 2007). Whether it is increased violence in society, the growth of juvenile delinquency, football hooliganism, riots, terrorism, permissive behaviour, falling educational standards, political apathy, or any other social problem we are ready to label 'fabulous powers' to the mass media. As Connell (2005) says, it is very usual to blame the mass media for 'the spread of this or that social problem by being carriers of all manner of distortion or misunderstanding'. This is a view of media power as total and all-embracing. Such a view of the power of the media is often couched in the assumption that this is something new. It is associated with the conditions of modernity. However, mass media history shows that the advent of every new medium of mass communication or general amusement has been accompanied with tall claims about the power of the medium to change the behavior of men, children and women as well as the values and ethics of society (Sarfi, 2011). As a result, we see a lot of stiffness among various groups, political parties, and even the states. Objective media representation of world issues is crucial. Whenever media reports are censored or biased, the people's basic rights are steadily undermined. In such situations, violations and unaccountability often go unnoticed and suppressed viewpoints become ordinary (Shah, 2012). A similar news story appears with different headlines in newspapers of different countries of the world due to their foreign policy/stance on various issues. Similarly, a news item is presented with different angles and perspectives according to the editorial policy or foreign policy of the respective newspaper or government which sometimes distorts the truthfulness of news- a value that is considered lifeline of news.

Indo-Pak Rivalry

Since the inception in 1947 the India—Pakistan rivalry remains one of the most unresolved and enduring conflicts of the present time. The stiff relation continued ever since, with the periodic resumption of crisis and wars. Since 1947 the two countries have fought four wars and remained as hostile neighbors by waging a low-intensity conflict in the disputed territory of Kashmir since the late 1980s (Paul, 2005). The causes of rivalry are numerous from Kashmir issue to Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and regional power

distribution to great power politics and territorial divisions, construction of narrative about war on terror and media trial.

Research Methodology

Operational Definitions

Expats: Pakistani and Indian Nationals residing in the Sultanate of Oman having at least master degree as their academic qualification.

Unbiased/Favorable/Supportive (+): Any response that is in line with the foreign policy (official standpoint) of the respective country.

Biased/Unfavorable/Opposite/Negative (-): Any response of Pakistani and Indian mass media will be considered as Unfavorable/Opposite/ Negative which is pessimistic in tone or if it describes the official standpoint on the foreign policy initiative of that particular country in a negative manner or it disapproves or discredits the overall policy of its base country.

Neutral/Balanced/Mixed (0): Any response will be considered as neutral and balanced/mixed if its contents place no clear emphasis on either of the favorable or unfavorable aspect of the issue.

Data Gathering and Instrumentation

A Questionnaire was distributed with questions to be ticked and rated on a 5-point likert scale.

Population, Sample and Data Collection

One hundred (100) questionnaires were administered in the Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman between Pakistani and Indian nationals having at least master as their academic qualification. This data gathering process was for a period from July 2015 to June 2016. Out of the total 100 questionnaires, N= 78. In view of the study undertaken, the tool for data collection was formal questionnaire. The questionnaire was in English.

Data Coding and Analysis

In order for easy recoding of the data into the computer, all the variables were identified and denoted by a numeral value. The data were then put on to the excel spread sheet, this was later fed to SPSS software program for frequencies and statistical analysis.

The data gathered was analyzed using SPSS in order to see whether the information collected was adequate for the subject of the study. Chi-Square was applied to test for the independence of the variables and gather the level of significance among the variables that were being tested.

Twenty-seven respondents from both the countries mentioned that they used mass media very frequently for news consumption. Out of which almost sixteen (60 percent) were from Pakistan. Twenty-six respondents said that they used mass media frequently for news consumption. While fourteen respondents said that they used mass media occasionally for news consumption. The $\chi^2 = .943$ shows no significant difference in the frequency of use of mass media among the respondents from both the nations.

Table 4: Comparison of Time Spent Daily on News

Nationality	Time spent daily					Total
	More than an hour	Thirty minutes to one hour	Fifteen minutes to 30 minutes	Five minutes to 15 minutes	Not at all	
Pakistani	20	11	11	3	2	47
	66.7%	52.4%	84.6%	30.0%	50.0%	60.3%
Indian	10	10	2	7	2	31
	33.3%	47.6%	15.4%	70.0%	50.0%	39.7%
Total	30	21	13	10	4	78
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The Table above shows that almost 85 percent of the Pakistani respondents spend fifteen to thirty minutes of their daily time on news consumption. Around 67 percent spend more than an hour. While in the case of the Indian respondents, 70 percent of them spend around five to fifteen minutes daily on media news consumption. Forty seven percent spent around thirty minutes to an hour while 33 percent spent more than an hour on news consumption. The $\chi^2 = .082$ shows that there is no significant difference in the time spent on news consumption between respondents of both the countries.

Table 5: Comparison of Time Spent Daily on BBC News

Nationality	Frequency of using BBC for news consumption					Total
	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Not at all	
Pakistani	4	16	17	5	5	47
	100.0%	76.2%	60.7%	33.3%	50.0%	60.3%
Indian	0	5	11	10	5	31
	0.0%	23.8%	39.3%	66.7%	50.0%	39.7%
Total	4	21	28	15	10	78
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The data in the table above displays that 28 respondents from both the countries said that they watched BBC occasionally for news consumption, while 20 Pakistani respondents mentioned that they watched BBC from frequently to very frequently for news consumption. Only four Indian respondents mentioned that they watched BBC

frequently. The $\chi^2=.043$ indicates that there is no significant difference in frequency of using BBC for news consumption among respondents of both the countries.

Table 6: Comparison on Awareness of News Report

Nationality	Aware of news report regarding fund provided to MQM by India					Total
	Fully aware	Partially Aware	Just heard about it	Not Aware	Don't know	
Pakistani	10	23	11	3	0	47
	100.0%	88.5%	45.8%	30.0%	0.0%	60.3%
Indian	0	3	13	7	8	31
	0.0%	11.5%	54.2%	70.0%	100.0%	39.7%
Total	10	26	24	10	8	78
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	38.605 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	48.988	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	27.531	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	78		

a. 3 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.18.

Responding to the question about the awareness of the news regarding funds provided to MQM by India, out of the forty-seven Pakistani respondents, thirty three of them said that they were either fully or partially aware of it. While eleven respondents mentioned that they had just heard the news while they were responding to the questionnaire. Whereas only three Indian respondents were partially aware of the news, thirteen respondents said that they had just heard the news while filling the questionnaire. The $\chi^2=.000$ confirms that it is highly significant difference.

Table 7: Comparison of the Source to the BBC Report

Nationality	Source of awareness of the BBC report					Total
	From BBC	Internet	Other news channels/ Print Media	Interpersonal Communication	Don't Know	
Pakistani	8	9	17	13	0	47
	100.0%	75.0%	94.4%	52.0%	0.0%	60.3%
Indian	0	3	1	12	15	31
	0.0%	25.0%	5.6%	48.0%	100.0%	39.7%
Total	8	12	18	25	15	78
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.221 ^a	5	.001
Likelihood Ratio	23.092	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.739	1	.053
N of Valid Cases	78		

a. 6 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.59.

The Table on the source of the news reflects that 8 Pakistani respondents had seen the news on BBC; Seventeen had accessed the news in other channels and print media. While 9 respondents said that they had sourced this news from the internet. Where as in the case of Indian respondents, fifteen respondents mentioned that they did not know, followed by twelve respondents mentioning that this news was sourced by interpersonal communication. Furthermore, only three respondents replied that they sourced this news on-line. The $\chi^2 = .000$ confirms that there is a high significant difference.

Table 8: Comparison on the Evaluation of Credibility of BBC as a News Media

Nationality	Evaluation on the credibility of BBC as a News Media						Total
	Highly Credible	Credible	Credibility depends upon the nature of news	Not Credible	Don't Know	Did Not Respond	
Pakistani	2	19	12	3	2	9	47
	50.0%	86.4%	48.0%	60.0%	16.7%	90.0%	60.3%
Indian	2	3	13	2	10	1	31
	50.0%	13.6%	52.0%	40.0%	83.3%	10.0%	39.7%
Total	4	22	25	5	12	10	78
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.221 ^a	5	.001
Likelihood Ratio	23.092	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.739	1	.053
N of Valid Cases	78		

a. 6 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.59.

Responding to the question on credibility of BBC as a news channel, there is a difference in the way the respondents answered this question while nineteen respondents of Pakistani origin felt that BBC was credible with their news coverage, on the other hand ten respondent of Indian origin said that they did not know about the credibility of BBC. Almost same number of respondents from both countries agreed that credibly depends upon the nature of news. However, the $\chi^2 = .001$ affirms that there is a high significant difference.

Table 9: Comparison of Bias in Reporting of this Issue

Nationality	Level of bias in reporting this issue					Total
	Biased	Neutral	Unbiased	Extremely unbiased	Did not Respond	
Pakistani	13	23	7	1	3	47
	76.5%	50.0%	77.8%	50.0%	75.0%	60.3%
Indian	4	23	2	1	1	31
	23.5%	50.0%	22.2%	50.0%	25.0%	39.7%
Total	17	46	9	2	4	78
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The table above shows that the same number of respondents from both the countries was neutral while thirteen respondents of Pakistani origin said that the report was biased. The $\chi^2 = .240$ statistically proves that there is no difference.

Table 10: Comparison of BBC's Ideological Biased

Nationality	Is BBC ideologically biased						Total
	Extremely Biased	Biased	Neutral	Unbiased	Extremely unbiased	Did not Respond	
Pakistani	0	21	16	5	3	2	47
	0.0%	75.0%	47.1%	62.5%	75.0%	66.7%	60.3%
Indian	1	7	18	3	1	1	31
	100.0%	25.0%	52.9%	37.5%	25.0%	33.3%	39.7%
Total	1	28	34	8	4	3	78
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The Table above shows that the twenty-one Pakistani respondents felt that BBC is ideologically biased. Sixteen of them were neutral while five respondents felt the BBC ideologically was not biased. The Indian respondents responded by almost most half of them were neutral while seven of them stated that BBC's ideology was biased one responded felt that BBC was extremely biased. Furthermore, only three respondents replied that BBC was not biased.

The $\chi^2 = .223$ statistically shows that there is no significant difference.

Table 11: Comparison About Personal Opinion v/s Nations Stand Point

Nationality	Your opinion v/s official stand point of the country					Total
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Undecided	Don't know	
Pakistani	9	7	22	5	4	47
	81.8%	77.8%	59.5%	38.5%	50.0%	60.3%
Indian	2	2	15	8	4	31
	18.2%	22.2%	40.5%	61.5%	50.0%	39.7%
Total	11	9	37	13	8	78
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.250 ^a	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	39.153	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.972	1	.324
N of Valid Cases	78		

a. 5 cells (41.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.19.

As can be seen in the table above, 21 respondents from India did not know about the trend of the media with regards to this news story. While 12 respondents of Pakistan said that they were favorable, another thirteen of them said that this news story was the top agenda in the Media. The $\chi^2 = .000$ statistically shows that there is a high significant difference between the opinions of the respondents.

Findings and Conclusion

Respondents for the survey were citizens of either India or Pakistan, residing in Oman with an academic qualification of a master's degree or a Doctorate. The consumption of news through mass media was also high. Almost half of the respondents spent more than an hour on news daily. However, for the time spent on BBC, it is observed that a majority of them said that they watched BBC occasionally. The percentages of Pakistani nationals were higher in the awareness of the news story about MQM being funded by India. Again, as MQM is a political party in Pakistan, and the media in Pakistan has highlighted this story could be the possible reasons for the higher awareness. Most of the Indian respondents said that they had come to know about this news through word of mouth i.e. interpersonal communications.

Responding to the credibility of BBC as a news media, one third of the respondents from both the countries felt that credibility depended upon the nature of the news. Furthermore, responding to the question on bias in reporting the Indian funding of MQM, more than half of the respondents were neutral.

While commenting on BBC being biased ideologically, almost half of the Pakistani respondents felt that it was biased. While commenting on the trend by the national media on the news more than 50 percent of the Pakistani respondents felt that the news was highlighted / glorified and was the top media agenda while 67 percent of their Indian counterparts did not know about it. Again, marginal 13 percent opined that the Indian national media has marginalized the BBC's story in their contents.

Following are the key findings:

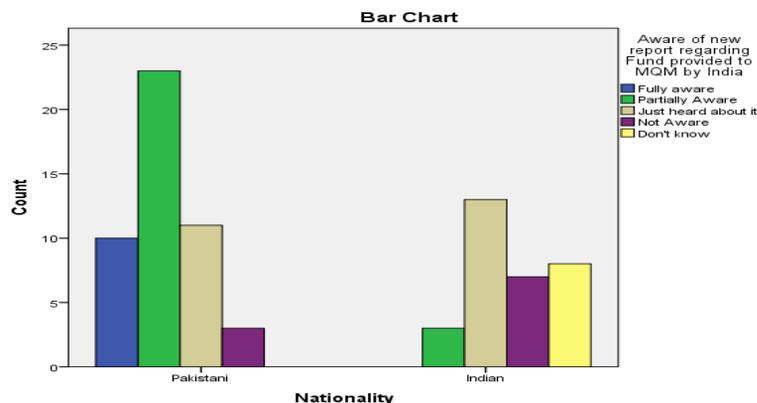
1. The perception of respondents from both the countries varies. In some areas this variation is highly significant.
2. The national media of both the countries has adopted the policy of journalistic nationalism. Hence, they were supporting the official stand point of their states.

3. The usage of mass media for the news consumption was revealed to be quite high as close to 70 percent of the respondent from the sample frame consume the mass media for news from "very frequently" to "frequently".
4. Around 40 percent of the respondents from both India and Pakistan are consuming news for more than an hour daily. On the other side majority of them said that they watched BBC occasionally.
5. The percentages of Pakistani nationals were higher in the awareness of the news story about MQM being funded by India.
6. One third of the respondents from both the countries felt that credibility of BBC as a news media depends upon the nature of the news.
7. A sizeable percentage (50 percent) of the Pakistani respondents felt that BBC is ideologically biased.
8. The trend adopted by the Pakistani and Indian national media on the issue was pole apart. Fifty percent of the Pakistani respondents felt that the news was highlighted / glorified and was the top media agenda in the Pakistan's national media. A marginal 13 percent respondent from Indian support that the Indian national media has marginalized the BBC's story in their contents. Another 67 percent were unaware.

A high significant relationship has been found in the following four areas;

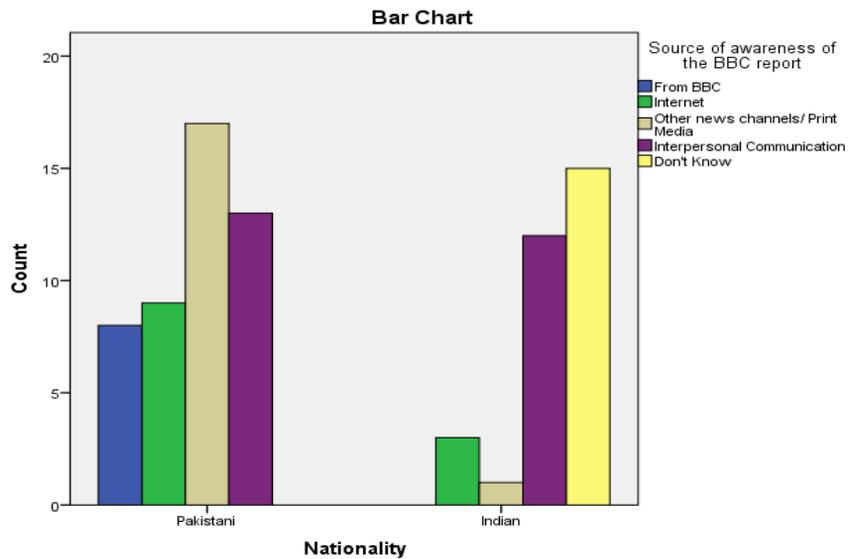
1. Awareness of the news regarding funds provided to MQM by India

Out of the 47 Pakistani respondents, thirty three of them said that they were either fully or partially aware of it. While eleven respondents mentioned that they had just heard the news while they were responding to the questionnaire. Whereas only three Indian respondents were partially aware of the news, thirteen respondents said that they had just heard the news while filling the questionnaire. The $\chi^2 = .000$ confirms that it is highly significant difference. Below is presented in the Bar Chart.



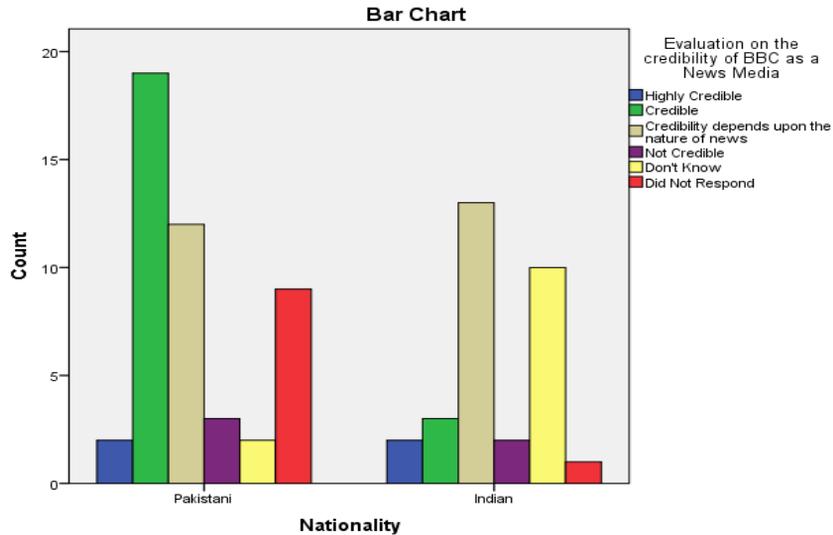
2. Source of Awareness of the BBC report

Source of the news reflects that 8 Pakistani respondents had seen the news on BBC; seventeen had accessed the news in other channels and print media. While 9 respondents said that they had sourced this news from the internet. Where as in the case of Indian respondents, fifteen respondents mentioned that they did not know, followed by twelve respondents mentioning that this news was sourced by interpersonal communication. Furthermore, only three respondents replied that they sourced this news on-line. The $\chi^2 = .000$ confirms that there is a significant difference. The bar chart below indicates the same.



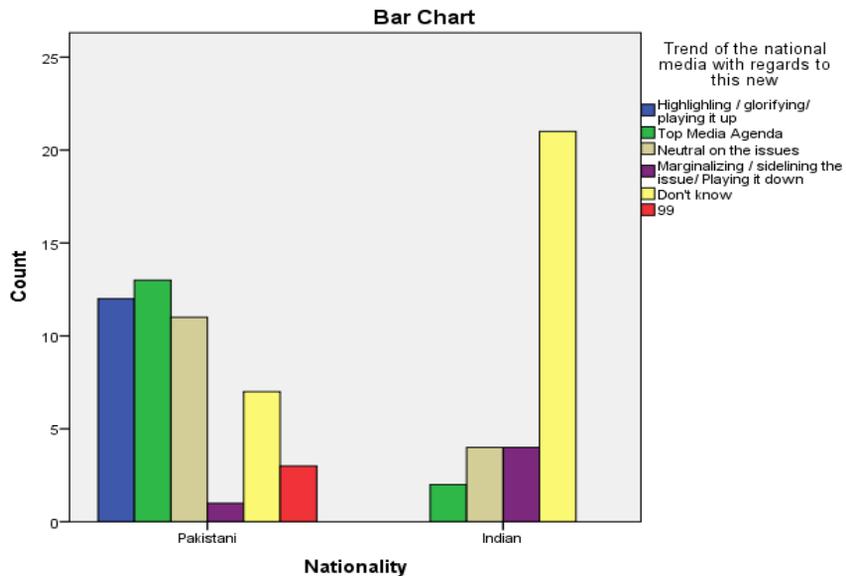
3. Credibility of BBC as a news channel

Nineteen respondents of Pakistani origin felt that BBC was credible with their news coverage, ten respondents of Indian origin said that they did not know about the credibility of BBC. Almost same number of respondents from both countries agreed that credibility depends upon the nature of news. However, the $\chi^2 = .001$ affirms that there is a high significant difference. The bar chart depicts it as follows;



4. Trend followed by the respective National Media

As can be seen in the below bar chart, 21 respondents from Indian subcontinent did not know about the trend of the media with regards to this news story. While 12 respondents of Pakistan said that they were favorable, another thirteen of them said that this news story was the top agenda in the Media. The $\chi^2 = .000$ statistically shows that there is a high significant difference between the opinions of the respondents.



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