

Factionalism among Sindh journalists in Pakistan: Causes and motives

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Abstract

This paper presents preliminary data regarding rifts among journalists in Sindh province, Pakistan. It analyzes the reasons and motives of differences among the journalists of Sindh and responsible for rifts. It focuses on the reasons for factionalism among the journalist community in province. The data is collected through six focus group discussions of purposively selected districts of Sindh province. The major findings show that differences among journalists community have developed mainly due to vested interests, conspiracies of media organizations/owners, and government; along with senior journalists monopoly established over the juniors in the news profession. Due to these reasons journalists have moved away from district press clubs and have developed their own new press clubs. Others have regrouped themselves under the tutelage of some media organizations.

Keywords: *Factionalism; journalists; grouping; media organizations; press clubs*

1 Introduction

Apparently it seems that occupation-based unions of members of different professions exist and thrive everywhere in the world. And so is an example about journalists in Sindh province, Pakistan. They press clubs and unions to protect their rights and raise voice against the violation of their professional rights. Simultaneously, however, the Sindh journalists have been seen to become victims of factionalism among them. As due to some reasons, instead of becoming together at one platform one union or press club, they have established more than one press club. In this way, this article is an attempt to find the answer of the causes

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and motives behind the rifts among the Sindh journalists and who is responsible for such consequence. To the best knowledge of the researcher, this research attempt is the first of its nature, particularly in the context of journalism culture in Pakistan. As the related literature-review about journalistic studies anywhere does not indicate any findings about studying the causes and motives behind the factions and divisions among journalistic unions in the form of press clubs.

1.1 Literature review

Journalistic studies in the form of surveys were conducted during the 20th century in Germany and the US. And it was in the 1970s that such studies 'became widely accepted among scholars internationally' (Weischenberg and Scholl, 1998: 37) cited in (Deuze, 2002, p. 1). According to Deuze, some of the most significant of these studies were those conducted by Johnstone et. al (1976) in the US; Kepplinger (1979) in Germany; and Tunstall (1970) in Great Britain. These focussed on journalists' personal characteristics such as their educational, ethnic, or religious background, the division of labour within news organisations, the way journalists perceived their role in society, and their perception of the threat put by increased media concentration. Further, Deuze notes that the first national survey on journalists was undertaken in the US by Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman in 1971 which was then published in book form in 1976 (2002, p. 1).

Additionally, Johnstone et al. say to have carried out the first systematic study of the social characteristics of journalists (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1976, p. 1). Their study sought to 'present a representative overview of the nature of newsmen and news work' in America (Johnstone et al., 1976, p. ix), and examined the American journalist from every angle: his (or her) social origins, patterns of training and recruitment, career histories and job aspirations, division of labour within news-media, professional behaviour and values, working conditions, financial rewards, and sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. What was novel about this study, according to the authors, was that except for a few studies dealing with the 'characteristics of individual journalists' there were no previous studies of members of the profession as a whole.

The other systematic study of American journalists was conducted by Weaver and Wilhoit (1986), and examined the

changing nature of the role of the journalist, the background and education of members of the profession, their attitudes, beliefs, and values; and the effects of new technology on journalists' work (David H. Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, p. vi). Weaver and Wilhoit compared their findings with those of Johnstone et al. who were all sociologists. Despite remarkable similarity in the general pattern of both the above mentioned studies, there was one sharp contrast between their goals. As Johnstone et al. argued 'Our goal is sociological inquiry, not social criticism' (Johnstone et al., 1976, p. vii); in contrast, however Weaver and Wilhoit maintained that though their goal was 'systematic inquiry', but they did not claim to approach their study as disinterested academics. Rather they sought to find ways to make 'journalistic careers more fulfilling and rewarding' (1986, p. vi). Subsequently Weaver and Wilhoit undertook two follow-up survey studies '*The American Journalist in the 1990s*' in 1992, and '*The American Journalist in the 21st century: U.S. news people at the dawn of a new millennium*' in 2002, both patterned on the 1971 study of Johnstone et al.; however the 2002 study included internet journalists and included more open-ended comments about why respondents chose journalism as a profession, their job satisfaction, journalistic freedom, performance of news organisations (D. H. Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007, pp. vii-viii).

Hanitzsch in this regard observes that similarities exist between the professional routines, editorial procedures, and socialization processes of news professionals in every country. Simultaneously, the professional views and practices of journalists in different countries are influenced by the 'national media system' of which they are a part, which results in some differences (Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 413). Therefore, the attempt to explore such differences and similarities in journalistic culture has become an interesting sphere in the field of journalism studies.

1.2 Research gap and research question

Keeping in consideration the discussion of the above literature review the gap is found in the related literature about studying the journalists in the context of factionalism among their community and its reasons. Therefore, this study focuses specifically the rifts and their causes among the journalists in Sindh province, Pakistan. And below is one of the research questions which were developed in the consideration of research gap and addressed in focus group discussions:

Research question: What are the reasons for the rifts among Sindh Journalists?

2 Methodology

2.1 Research design

The focus group discussions were used to collect data; because, the nature of the research question required qualitative data to be answered. As focus groups according to (Puchta & Potter, 2004) elicit participants' feeling, attitudes and perceptions about a selected topic. The targeted population of this study was working journalists in Sindh employed in either privately-owned or state-run media outlets for diverse media organizations of Sindhi, Urdu and English language.

2.2 Location, population, sample and sample size

The location of the study was Sindh province which during the data collection period was administratively distributed in twenty three (23) districts. To arrive at the sample a purposive sampling technique was applied, because according to Hansen et al. (1998) in focus groups the persons who are invited to participate must be able and willing to provide the required information (A. Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, Newbold, & Halloran, 1998). Therefore, out of a total of twenty three (23), six (06) districts were purposively chosen. The reasons for selecting those six districts follow: First, compared to all other un-selected districts, the membership figure of the journalists in the six selected district press clubs was larger. Therefore, it was easier to arrange the required number focus group discussions and to select the articulate journalists. Second, due to personal contacts of the researcher with some journalists, the researcher had more access to the journalists in these purposively selected district press clubs. Third, it was determined to conduct at least six focus group discussions; because according to Hansen et al. (1998) 'it would be difficult to justify fewer than six groups' (A. Hansen et al., 1998, p. 268). And about the number of participants in each group, though it was attempted to arrange at least six participants for each focus group, as Morgan (1998, p. 1) suggests that 'six to eight participants in each group'. However, in practice on average five (5) participants could be arranged for each focus group discussion.

2.3 Data collection

The instrument for focus groups contained a pre-determined agenda, which was used in each and all discussions allowing the participants to speak on the agenda as they wished while a moderator kept seeking to elicit and measure the arguments, views and responses of the participants. And the questions on the agenda were formulated as loose, broad and much more flexible; because owing to such formulation the discussion may also suggest additional topics of inquiry to be pursued suggest (Alreck & Settle, 1995, p. 397).

2.4 Recruitment of the participants

The recruitment of the participants was made with the co-ordination and consultation of office-bearers and senior journalists of the selected press clubs. The selection of the participants was determined keeping in mind that all the participants belong to different media outlets and they must be willing and articulate. The timing of all the focus group discussions was fixed at evening, except two. Finally, out of a total of six the three focus group discussions were arranged at the press clubs of the concerned districts, two at district bureau offices of media organizations and one at the regional office of a news agency. See table 1 for exact details about the time, location and number of participants in each focus group discussion.

Table 1: Time, location, duration and number of participants in focus group discussions;

Sampling Unit	Date and time	Venue	Partic- ipants	Duration
District Karachi	06-4-2009-6:00 pm	District press club Karachi	05	59:34
District Sukkur	11-4-2009-1:00 pm	Office Daily Ibrat newspaper	05	47:39
District Khairpur	11-4-2009-6:00 pm	Office Sindh TV channel	06	46:52
District Larkana	12-4-2009-1:00 pm	District press club Larkana	04	50:28
District Hyderabad	13-4-2009-9:00 pm	Office APP news agency	06	01:15
District Thatta	14-4-2009-5:00 pm	District press club Thatta	04	57:49

2.5 Implementation of the focus group sessions

The focus group discussions began with an introduction by the moderator which had three sections: Welcome statement, a brief overview of the subject matter to be taken up, and an explanation of the discussion rules.

2.6 Recording the focus groups

The principal data produced by focus groups are the verbal responses, statements, opinions, arguments and interactions of the participants (A. S. Hansen & Newbold, 1998, pp. 276-277). Therefore, taking into account the nature of the data, all the focus group sessions were audio-recorded. Because, this is the most simple and inexpensive method, and it can be transcribed verbatim or condensed into brief, written reports (Alreck & Settle, 1995, p. 404). In addition, audio-recording is considered the most common way of making the focus group conversations analysable (Morgan, 1998, p. 56).

2.7 Data analysis

According to their nature 'the fundamental data that focus groups produce are transcripts of the group discussions' (Morgan, 1988, p. 10). Thus, the analysis of focus group data involves the researcher's subjective process of making sense of what was discussed in the groups. Therefore, a final written report of the focus group data has been put together and discussed under the major themes and research question that took place across the full set of groups.

2.8 Ethical issues

In consideration of the ethical aspects the participants were informed that what the purpose of the focus group discussions was and where and how they would be conducted, with whom and who the researcher was and what they represent, and also they were told that the discussions would be audio-taped.

3 Findings of the focus group discussions

3.1 Factionalism and its reasons, among Sindh journalists

To begin with, it is nowadays commonly observable that almost in all the districts of Sindh, journalists instead of being at one platform

are found distributed into various groups. Some journalists have established new/separate press clubs, having seceded from the district press clubs. Others have grouped themselves under the flag of a specific media organization. Therefore, the chief purpose of this research question was to know and assess the factors behind such groupings among journalists in Sindh province, Pakistan. In this regard, the two informants belonging to one urban focus group started in this way that *'there are many reasons'* (Karachi focus group) or *'there are various factors involved in dividing the journalists'* (Karachi focus group). Thus, those diverse reasons and factors enumerated by the focus group participants in the discussions are thematically discussed as follows:

3.1.1 Conspiracy by media organizations/owners

One of the various reasons, the participants enlisted in their responses were *'conspiracy by media organizations'*. As four participants said that, along with other factors, media organizations are also responsible for the division among journalists in following words that *'media organizations are also involved'* (Hyderabad focus group), and *'media organizations are involved in dividing the journalists'* (Karachi focus group). The third participant while placing the responsibility with media owners also revealed their interest behind the division among the journalists in following manner, that *'media owners also want the division of journalists; because, journalists back bite each other, in this way the organizations stay well-aware of the activities of their reporters from whom they extort money and how much money they extort so the media organizations also can have a share of it'* (Khairpur focus group). The fourth participant, along with media organizations also blamed the state, in his words *'the reasons behind it (groupings) are media organizations and the state'* (Larkana focus group).

3.1.2 Conspiracy by state/government

Moreover, about the involvement of state behind the rifts among journalists six other participants underpinned this theory by stating that *'official authorities also want their groups, so the journalists will be weaker'* (Larkana focus group), the *'state wants the journalists to be divided'*, (Thatta focus group), *'itself in the media there are some non-serious journalists so the state divides the journalists'* (Thatta focus group), and *'they (the state) want journalists to be divided, they will never like to see the unity of journalists'* (Thatta focus group). One other participant while enumerating many factors behind the rifts

among journalists not only took the name of the state, but also called it a chief beneficiary in the following way that *'the chief stakeholder is the Establishment of the state'* (Karachi focus group). Regarding the tactics of state in dividing the journalists, one participant said that *'government people by various tactics create groupings as they can damage the press'* (Thatta focus group). And some other tactics as were stated by one participant follows that *'they (the government people) buy journalists, award them government contracts and offer even hard cash and put pressure upon them'* (Thatta focus group). Added to that one of the tactic used at district level as told by one participant is the *'government formulates policies at district level they divide journalists into groups, and for that purpose they prepare lists of journalists who would be obliged and who would not be obliged with information collection at district level government departments'* (Thatta focus group). The participant further continued that *'to a great extent the government has had success in creating rifts among journalists'* (Thatta focus group).

3.1.3 Interference by political parties

Some participants cited involvement or interference by political parties as one of the factors behind the rifts among the journalists in Sindh. In this regard, one participant said that *'other reason political parties as well place their persons in the press clubs'* (Karachi focus group). Moreover, one participant mentioned the names of the mainstream political parties in Pakistan behind the rift among journalists in following words that, *'There is political involvement. The PPP (Pakistan Peoples' Party) would like one of theirs to be the president of the press club and the Muslim League would like one of theirs to be the president of the press club'* (Larkana focus group). And a similar view was given by another participant from another focus group that *'The specific persons of MNAs (Member of National Assembly) and MPAs (Member of Parliament Assembly) who work for their interests are the office-bearers of press clubs and keep a hold upon press clubs'* (Sukkur focus group). In conclusion it seems that politics or politicians have also a part in getting the journalists divided into groups.

3.1.4 The monopoly of senior journalists at press clubs

Another reason for factionalism among journalists, in the view of one participant, was that *'one of the main reasons for grouping is senior journalists'* (Khairpur focus group). In this way, different participants gave different reasons why senior journalists have

become the cause of rifts. As one participant said that it was the result of the emergence of electronic media. He stated that *'this is the era of electronic media and senior journalists who belong to print media have lessened their importance, so they have nothing to do and just conspire and poison the ears of junior journalists against each other'* (Khairpur focus group). However, another participant, categorizing the journalists into two political ideologies, said that *'there are two categories of journalists first, those who joined journalism before 1990, who used to report in favour and praise of bureaucracy and bureaucrats. Second, category is of those fresh blood and idealists who belong to the politics of leftism, so after 1990 when the Soviet Union of Russia was dismantled they came to the profession of journalism. And due to the arrival of these left-wingers the seniors became disturbed'* (Thatta focus group). The opinions of other participants implied that somehow these senior journalists want to keep establishing their monopoly upon the press clubs and do not allow press club membership to others. As one participant described the situation in the words that *'actually the number of journalists who write and report stories sitting in hotels is more than the member journalists of this press club where we are sitting now. However, if you will not accept them and for a long period would not award them membership of the press club then they will set up new groups or press clubs'* (Thatta focus group). The view of this participant also got support of another participant from a different focus group in the following words as *'in the press clubs of small cities membership is not awarded to junior journalists, therefore, they are divided into groups and they set up their separate press clubs'* (Khairpur focus group).

The reasons for not allowing membership to the junior journalists by senior journalists, one participant explained in this way, that *'due to fear of defeat in election seniors do not award membership to junior journalists, therefore, the juniors get disappointed and set up new press clubs'* (Hyderabad focus group). The other reasons for not allowing the press club membership to new entrants, young or junior journalists are that *'since years vested interest type of persons have occupied the press clubs. They have linkages with government departments and they extort money from there. Therefore, if a new entrant is entered in the field of journalism, they fear that the share of extorted money will dwindle in value, therefore, they (senior journalists) do not own to new entrants'* (Karachi focus group). In a similar vein, another participant also mentioned a similar reason for not allowing the press club membership to junior

journalists, in his words *'because the number of shares will increase in the booty'* (Khairpur focus group).

3.1.5 Leadership and press club funds

The other main factors behind rifts among journalists, according to the participants are leadership and funds. In regards to leadership, many participants said something like the participant who explained *'they want to be office-bears of the club'* (Khairpur focus group), *'everybody likes to establish one's dominance or aspire to be the officer-bearer of the press club'* (Khairpur focus group), *'clash of interest and a desire to be a leader are the reasons behind grouping'* (Larkana focus group). Some participants even mentioned the reasons for the interest by the journalists to be leaders or office bearers of the press clubs in the following way that *'leadership is the main reason, because when one becomes president of the press club he is recognized everywhere, in press conferences DCOs (District Coordination Officers), DPOs (District Police Officers) address him or when the president of the press club meets politicians they honour him'* (Larkana focus group). Another participant stated that *'we are agro-based and a feudal society, so everyone wants to be leader; because, if someone becomes the president of the press club, automatically, his personal relations increase in society'* (Larkana focus group). In addition to that some participants also identified funds, which are given to the district press clubs by government or ministers, as one of the reasons for rifts among journalists. As one participant said: *'funds are given to press clubs so conflicts over funds and conflicts over becoming the president of the press club'* (Sukkur focus group) are also reasons. Another participant identified funds as the reason for divisions: *'the reason for grouping is funds which are deposited in the account of the press club'* (Larkana focus group). Moreover, one participant while calling the funds a bone of contention among journalists also mentioned how frequently those funds are received by the press clubs: *'funds which the district government or the Sindh government awards annually'* (Sukkur focus group). More significant, as one participant noted about funds held by press clubs, was that *'there is no check and balance of them (funds)'* (Sukkur focus group).

Finally, another factor for the rifts among journalists is ethnic differences, particularly between Sindhi and Urdu speaking journalists. Regarding this cause one participant stated in detail that *'particularly, in our region (Sindh province) there is ethnic difference. There was a time in the Karachi Press Club that Sindhi*

journalist could not enter. He was not allowed to enter. This time the Karachi Press Club membership was not open because they knew that the number of Sindhi journalists would increase' (Karachi focus group).

4 Conclusion

Factionalism among Sindh journalists is common in almost all districts of Sindh. For example, some journalists have walk out of the main/basic district press clubs and established their own separate press clubs. Others have grouped themselves under the flagship of some exclusive media organisations. The causes for such factionalism may be conspiracies by media organisations, media owners, state or government. Further tactics of the state or government to divide journalists are buying them by awarding government contracts, offering hard cash, and pressurizing. At district level governments divide journalists into groups, and for that purpose they prepare lists of journalists who should be supplied news and who should not. Moreover, political parties also divide journalists by placing their members in the press club, who are then elected to posts within the press clubs, and serve the interests of their political parties. The other main reason for the division among journalists is the monopoly established by senior journalists, who rarely award press club membership to junior journalists.

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