

Today's News is tomorrow's history: Impact of Yellow Journalism, Tabloids and Paparazzi on the future of Journalism and future history of Pakistan

Muhammad Moiz Khan, Ridha Shaukat Ali , Mahnoor Faisal and Hadiqa Fatima Mithani

Abstract

In the race of two R's; revenue and rating, we often see that news agencies would go to any lengths to make their news sensational. News and reports lack in-depth research and prioritize entertaining people. Their target is to make their news "sensational" and to make it stand out among other news about the same topic. Yellow journalism, Paparazzi and Tabloidism are few examples of such style of news reporting. Pakistani media industry has also been affected by these unprofessional ways. Keeping in view the fact that Today's News is Tomorrow's history, we are making wrong history. All kinds of medium of mass communication are considered primary sources of history because they are written in the contemporary times. This research will be mainly focused on the aforementioned phenomenon and how they have affected Pakistani media industry directly and history of Pakistan indirectly and what is the future

of journalism and history of Pakistan due to such practices.

Keywords: Yellow journalism, tabloidism, paparazzi, Pakistan, journalism

Introduction:

The role of the agency of media in every civilized nation is to inform and educate the masses. It is, to take complex issues, topics and governmental policies, and translate them into an easy to understand language for their readers and viewers. The most appropriate way to approach the question; “Are Yellow Journalism, Tabloidism and Paparazzi the present or future of journalism in Pakistan?” is by analyzing the past and present media practices. There are many factors that have had a significant negative impact on journalism in Pakistan. To start with private electronic media was introduced into Pakistani society very late in comparison to other countries of the world. Even in South Asia Pakistan was late to allow private electronic media to emerge and flourish.

Secondly the government allowed the media groups to launch their own News TV channels. Usually around the world the print media is different from the electronic media. This duplication causes complexities of miss use of power of reaching people. Pakistan faced this problem a lot since 2000. Lastly the government injected funds into media to propagate their agenda and positive portrayal of their performance. This paper explores these aspects and discusses the byproducts of journalism in the post-modern era, in Pakistan.

Yellow journalism a survey:

Sensationalism exemplified by yellow journalism has been an issue of concern since the 20th century. It was during this phase that the call for a socially responsible media became vigorous since the press was believed to be perpetuating a culture of irresponsibility,

in the name of freedom of expression. As mentioned by (Yadav, 2011), (Kleemans, 2009), (K.A Omenugha, Oji M, 2008) the 'in-thing' now is "market-driven journalism"—prioritizing petty news items, certain kinds of layout, headline sizes, photo enhancements, flashy colors, irrelevant and lurid photos. The purpose behind these tactics was to appeal to mass audiences like entertainment, while trivializing factual and objective information. Starting with Electronic Media, it is the most important medium contributing in burgeoning of yellow journalism. When Pakistan Television (PTV) was launched it was perceived as the government's propaganda arm. Thus, criticism of government policies was obviously not a favorite debate. It was believed, that the birth of private television channels would bring to the screen credible information, intellectual debate and a pragmatic projection of the nation's problems along with potential solutions. It would be wrong to say that trends have not shifted an inch, there has definitely been progress. However a completely free and reliable media remains a far-fetched vision.

Debate:

In Europe the yellow journalism mushroomed due to the tug of war for commercialization. "Along with the growth of the popular press, a politics of news quality appeared. Reformers and traditional elites complained about the impact of journalism upon public intelligence and morality. The episodic character of newspaper content was said to hamper the ability of the public to engage in sustained or complex thought or deliberation, while the general taste for scandal and sensation seemed to coarsen public mores" (Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone, 2009, p. 20). The same seems to be the story with Pakistan. The devolution of true and sober journalism to yellow journalism was swift and brutal. In the race of sensationalism Pakistani electronic media during its early day in the first decade of twenty first century showed the severed bodies and decapitated heads of suicide bombers. Later laws were made and amended to stop the media franchises from broadcasting such disturbing images.

With about 19 (and ever increasing), 24-hour news channels, there is a constant bombardment of trifling stories, with minimal analysis and great glitz. Familiar faces appear on different channels as propaganda ambassadors for their respective political party, social cause or establishment position. Our airwaves are drowning with stories that are based on questionable sources, evidence and loads of assumption. Many of the popular talking heads have been awarded with the badge of 'yellow journalism', or 'establishment mouthpieces'. We are trying to stay afloat a flood of information with no lifeguard to teach us how to distinguish falsehood from truth. Also, the notion of 'Breaking News' might be aiding these media organizations in their relative ulterior motives. However, the damage it can potentially do to this field will need a long time to heal. More importantly these stories and reports become a source of history for later years.

Matiullah Jan (Journalism.co.uk, 2011) uncovered the journalists' dubious tricks and scandals in the Dawn News series "*Apna Gareban*", which started in January 2011. Consequently, now faces massive backlash from journalists' associations and unions. He exposed the objectionable relationship that journalists relish with politicians, and the privileges granted by the political regime of that time. He claims that, the majority of district correspondents and stringers of a number of dailies and news channels in Pakistan are involved in criminal activities such as burglaries and even smugglings. The 'yellow' press covers up their heinous acts and as a result they escape any punishment or accountability. "If yellow journalism in Pakistan is not controlled, the whole profession will be ruined and lose its credibility", Jan contested.

Jan's series proved to be an effective one as he exposed the so-called journalists who are using fake press cards to put pressure on law enforcement agencies and other governmental bodies. Furthermore, in this series he also dealt with the topic of dozens of 'dummy' newspapers in the country, without a true identity or even circulation, engaging in yellow journalism and blackmailing. This series, we think is ambitious but flawed, as belonging to same

profession he should have taken some precautions and followed certain guidelines while revealing the perpetrators.

The study of (Yadav, 2011) witnesses the dawn of Breaking News media as an issue of social irresponsibility of the press when he concludes that, "the entry of the electronic media had changed the dimensions of news coverage and presentation of news. As a result, the coverage has become either sensationalized or commercialized". Thus, gradually the media is sliding from its social function by providing abnormal coverage to normal events and subjects. (Pont, 1998) argues that, the effect of this shift to a more entertainment-based journalism style, often called "infotainment", and is due to the ignorance of Page 3 in case of Print Media. Allocating more attention to issues such as health care, education and utilizing most of the space in advertising while giving a back seat to entertainment. He further elaborates that; the country is deprived of essential information required to reaching sound policy judgments. He rightly concludes that our perception of society varies greatly depending on our source of news.

We reassert (Pont, 1998) statements, that sensational journalism undoubtedly has an adverse effect on the thought processes of the audience. Often, their use of words, language and other terms of references coupled with pictures for visual support, they trigger in the public an unwarranted and unnecessary cause for alarm and fear, especially at crucial times. At such instances, rather than dousing tension and panic, the media helps fan flames of social unrest. (Raza M. Riaz, 2012) conducted a survey and found, that respondents believed that private news channels are needlessly sensitizing matters related to politics, celebrities and crime etc. (Sajjad Paracha, 2013) in another study concluded that news about terrorism is especially exaggerated. Often times, in the race of being the first one to break news they do not even confirm it. They shared the example of a cylinder blast in a house reported as a bomb explosion.

Although jargons like ‘Yellow Journalism’ usually have a negative connotation, but scholars, researchers and critics state that, they might have a few benefits for a certain group of people. Can yellow journalism offer anything positive to society? (Stockwell, 2004) also questions, do the audiences find something useful in these programs? What is apparently insignificant to those schooled in traditional journalistic practice, can, as a matter of fact be quite significant to the audiences. Consumer stories, in particular those using hidden cameras, unveil the shortcomings of commercial practices and providing these viewers a golden opportunity to learn from them.

Drawing the comparison between the study of (Stockwell, 2004) and (Yadav, 2011), our apprehension comes to a simple conclusion; the norm should never be the right to ‘sell’ the media itself, or the owners themselves, the ideologies they favor, or even the people they ‘market’. It rather should be the right to ‘tell’. Informing the public about the truth of every event, issue and situation and not permitting any flowering to come in the way.

(Shamsi, 2005) in his book says that, “for making news story, reporters include laudatory adverbs, adjective instead of facts and figures”. This is very prevalent in Pakistani media not only in news reporting, but also in talk shows. The anchors in a bid to attain higher ratings and revenues, try their utmost to initiate fighting and shouting amongst the participants. The race for ratings is at its peak, and to win it they resort to techniques that are unprofessional. Some recent events that depict how ratings are the supposed god of these news channels are that of Imran Khan’s divorce and marriages. It was almost as if his marital affairs are a topic of national interest and therefore, a concern of every citizen. With Bollywood songs playing in the background, the reporting tactics were utterly distasteful. The news of his marriage and divorce were broadcasted for several weeks. This type of coverage is an abuse of media freedom with no consideration given to media ethics.

(Michael Karlsson, Jesper Stromback, 2011) commented on a similar debate assert that, the role of journalists in news content has diminished in the first decade of twenty-first century. Nevertheless, due to recent technological advancements and ownership transformations in the media industry, the most influential part is still played by journalists. Furthermore, research indicates that journalism has developed to be more interpretive than descriptive. Some early work by (Ponkey, 2012) also deals with insensitivity in journalism. She states that, “journalists should never suppress facts or distort them and never allow personal beliefs or commitments to change the story”. This discourse remains relevant today in Pakistan. To stand out among others, sometimes media anchors cross all dimensions of insensitivity and manipulate facts. They amplify reality and make it seem worse than it is, even at the cost of someone's life. The case of a well-known Pakistani journalist, Meher Bokhari, is an evident example. Bokhari interviewed the late Governor Punjab, Salman Taseer, and played a part in inciting hatred against him and fueling blasphemy charges against Taseer. Taseer was killed two months after the show was aired. It also illustrates how framing of the story and the choice of words have a huge impact on the audience.

A paper (Roger Dickinson, Bashir Memon, 2011), studies the liberalization of electronic media after 1999, paved the path to the broadcast of independently formulated fresh content. However, they claim that in spite of these newly introduced changes, governmental regulations were strict. Private channels, therefore, restricted themselves to televising programs related to entertainment in order to keep controversy at bay. Furthermore (Sidra & Babar, 2014) on ethics in journalism discuss a similar point. They expand on the positive effects on the media of the promulgation of the Freedom of Information and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance, in 2002. Contrary to the findings of the paper aforementioned, they state that this marked the initiation of an information age where private channels possessed the freedom to compete for greater

market share. This neck and neck situation was further challenged by the landing rights granted to foreign news channels such as CNN, BBC world and Sky News to work in Pakistan. Nonetheless, the cut-throat rivalry between channels like ARY News and GEO remains unmatched. (Raza M. Riaz, 2012)

It is important to note here, how since the very beginning economic and political factors have paid a highly crucial role in determining journalistic attitudes and practices. As Marxists would put it, to attract advertisers the media owners would prioritize maximizing their audiences. This would eventually enable them to accumulate greater profits. Media persons would go to any lengths and break all boundaries of ethical guidelines to achieve their targets. And if that was not the problem, political pressures snatch away from them their right to freedom of expression. Grave measures need to be taken that ensure the functioning of social agencies sans any external forces, be it political or economic. Impartiality, meritocracy and credibility should be the norm of these institutions.

Role of new Media

In today's digital epoch, with heaps of data conveniently accessible, people turn away from established news agencies and professional journalists as their primary source of news. One of the most robust sources of information, especially for teenagers and young adults, are blogs. As Tom Regan states, "in the eyes of many journalists, blogs are poorly written, self-absorbed, hyper-opinionated, and done by amateurs", but in the eyes of millennials they certainly are not. This is proven by the sudden upsurge of online media outlets in Pakistan, like 'MangoBaaz' and 'Parhlo.com' that have added record to yellow journalism. Click-bait articles are modern day yellow journalism. Presenting biased and personal opinions as facts and news is prevalent like never before. Moreover, bloggers who write articles do not hold any experience or expertise in the field of journalism. We believe that, the consumers are also responsible for the decline of true

journalism in Pakistan. People do not bother to check the credibility of the information given. It has become increasingly hard to know the difference between an actual piece of news and a clickbait article based on false news and misinformation. In the current scenario, there is not a single authority in Pakistan that regulates social media. True story versus spiced up story:

A prime victim of yellow journalism is Shahzeb's Khan's murder case by an online news publisher called 'Pakistan Today'. The publishing house reported that DSP Aurangzeb Khan (victim's father) is accepting blood money from the criminal's parents; in exchange of rupees 250 million. When contacted for confirmation, Shahzeb's father, refuted these allegations and labelled the news story as "fake". Supporters of the 'Shahzeb Khan Movement' were infuriated, and just after an hour of publishing the story, it was removed from their website. A stark reflection of how news organizations totally neglect ensuring the authenticity of any news is crystal clear here. Unethical and irresponsible reporting incidents of this nature are shoved under the rug on daily basis. This demonstrates how journalism is used to manipulate mindsets of the populace.

In Pakistan the English-language press covers a broadly liberal thought, their readership coming from the educated elite. Papers that are in regional languages and with a larger circulation are less critical of the government. They present themselves as more conservative in their religious and political outlook, while placing increased emphasis in their pages on scandal, celebrity gossip and entertainment news. Taking an example of a Pakistani newspaper, 'Khabreen Newspaper', it emerged as a rival of the two dominating groups; 'Jang' and 'Nawa-i-Waqt'. It covered a lot of sensationalized stories, and with its yellow journalistic trends, grabbed the attention of the readers. Khabreen rose to fame, and then it adopted a balanced approach. Though sometimes, it still employs its old methods. Several other newspapers tried to follow the same path, but failed to gain popularity, as by that time people had become aware of the yellow journalistic ploys by Khabreen.

Similarly, tabloids in Pakistan appears as “Eveningers”; evening newspapers. They are not taken seriously by the general public, although they do have a little circulation due to their catchy headlines, but remain uncommon in Pakistan.

Unlike its neighboring industry in Bollywood, the Pakistani media industry is not as popular for its paparazzi. Perhaps, this is the reason why research on this topic is almost non-existent in Pakistan. However, with the rise and prevalence of the new media there has been a wave of change. Not only has there been an increase in online publications, but also an escalation in social media outlets of magazines, newspapers and news channels. This obviously, is a consequence of the ubiquity of personal gadgets as well as wireless internet. Almost every individual living in the twenty first century has personal profiles on not just one social networking website, but multiple. The most commonly used include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. With such inventions, it was inevitable that the media would seize the opportunity and resort to the same platforms to promote their content. This would allow them to maximize their audiences while simultaneously generating profits.

In order to define ethics, (Ward, 2011) claimed that a discussion about ethics rotates around “what is good, what is right, or what is virtues”. Implementation of media ethics is a two-way street. Journalists own their right to freedom of expression whilst aiming to utilize it in a responsible manner. As a result, independence of the media organization is preserved but a sense of accountability of their actions is also induced. As (Bertrand, 2000) contends that a set of journalism ethos comprises of prohibition clauses; not to lie, not to hurt anybody and not to expropriate someone else’s property. Moreover, journalistic principle clauses such as to be competent, independent of economic, political and intellectual pressures, to give a complete, correct and fair, comprehensible report of the news are also included. Not to mention, to have a broad and in-depth definition of news to facilitate all social bodies, to protect and promote human rights and democracy, to strive

towards a betterment of society and to do nothing that might break public trust in the media.

While these set standards are too ideal to be fully applied, we feel it is better to propose a more realistic route. As (Sidra & Babar, 2014) contend in their work there are numerous pressures on journalists, hence we believe it would be nearly impossible to erase all of them. Instead of introducing another code of conduct, it would be more effective to guarantee a safe environment for journalists. Once their safety is not their personal concern, and they are confident that the state will guard them come what may; nothing will inhibit them from producing honest content. They will not succumb to traditional and popular methods of yellow journalism but rather be encouraged to stick to professionalism.

(Sidra & Babar, 2014) further say that, "Pakistani journalists lack expertise for basic journalism practices such as preparation of news content and use of inferences and statements." They support their claim by sharing research conducted by (Pintak and Nazir, 2013) who surveyed 395 journalists in 2010. They concluded, that majority of Pakistan's journalists are young, thus lack experience and are untrained. Their survey, for example, finds that around 80% of surveyed journalists were below forty years of age.

Fortunately, Pakistani journalist community realizes that journalists' unprofessionalism is among the topmost challenges faced by the industry. It breeds corruption and greatly damages the essence of journalism in Pakistan. Amateur journalists step into the field knowing zilch about how to go around it. Therefore, they very conveniently begin following the same old and popular ways, and unsurprisingly also become famous and 'successful'. To fix this, the system needs to be mended. The relevant authorities should establish proper institutions that offer graduate level programs on journalism, internships and training by the masters of this field.

Effect on History of Pakistan:

Any sincere attempt of research in history today would consider the study of newspapers of that era. If someone wants to dwell into the causes and impacts of Vietnam War he/she would study all the news coverage of the war by US and international media. In this case the way the war was covered matters the most. The efforts made by the trained and true journalists would yield the best research material and would be quoted the most.

Considering the significance of news coverage the dictators always bring legislations targeting newspapers and other mediums. Because it works in two ways, first it will portray a true picture of the ruling elite in the eyes of the people and for later times it will bring good name for them. Ayub Khan was the first military dictator in Pakistan who strangulated newspapers, the only news agency available at the time. Today we do not find any news items in local newspapers against Ayub Khan.

Rawalpindi conspiracy case was not discussed by the local press in 1951 and it was hushed away because of the involvement of a high ranking officers. However the international media covered it and it serve as a significant source of history today (Feldman, 2001, p. 39). Secondly the way journalists cover a story when they have no check on them influences the future course as well. The coverage of efforts made by any government during their tenure affects the voting pattern in the next elections. Most of the news channels and newspapers follow the popular trends to raise their ratings and the true purpose of journalism gets lost in the way.

Conclusion:

The masses who are addicted to sensational news and stories have become clients of yellow journalism, tabloidism and paparazzi. In today's contemporary world, where technology and knowledge dominate our life, to remain ignorant is a choice. The people need to make intelligent and informed decisions to be able to out rightly

reject yellow journalism. Otherwise, there would be no obstacle to stop the demise of ethical and objective journalism. They need to be aware that the business of yellow journalism, paparazzi and tabloidism run on the demand and supply rule. The more self-created conspiracy theories the public endorses and the more sensation they seek, the more are these dubious currents fueled. Eventually, they become successful to quite an extent, in manipulating the attitudes of the public.

Additionally, there needs to be an overhaul of the media industry. Major reforms should be contrived and enforced. There has to be an entire code of conduct for all media personnel. And they should follow a complete procedure of producing media content, to the tee. Any violation of this should result in serious consequences, for example termination of membership of the press club for a certain number of weeks. This process will confirm a better and accurate selection of news for the audience. We agree and accept that journalistic practices in Pakistan need to undergo a check; however it would be correct to claim that this field has indeed come a long way from where it started. A mammoth amount of work needs to be done, but with certain alterations in the system we can get there.

The connectivity of news with the history has been neglected as a study. Today's news provide context to the happenings and their understanding of future (Hans Mathias Kepplinger & Gregor Daschmann, 1997). Today more than ever it has become imperative to ponder upon the impact of Yellow Journalism on the profession and the future history. The purpose of such studies is to prepare and train journalists to work and in progressive and constructive way.

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