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# Observance of Ethics in Crime News Reporting with Respect to Pakistani Society

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**Abstract:** *Media is the greatest source of information in today's world. Media is the fastest way to get news from the remotest part of the world and deliver it to masses. Thus play a vital role in shaping the minds of people. This study seeks to comprehend media ethics in Pakistani society. Main focus is the observance of ethics in headlines and news reports related to crime and violence. The aim of the research is to seek the Psychological effects of violence news, role of crime news in presenting political and diplomatic image of Pakistan to the world, to find the link between crime news and rating of a channel and the role of responsible journalism as concerned for news bulletins. The study lies under the social responsibility theory of press. The method used for the research is the in-depth interview method.*

**Keywords:** *Ethics, Crime News, News Bulletins, Private News Channels.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, media is the fastest way to deliver information. Our lives have become dependent on it. Nobody can deny the importance of media in life whether it's print, electronic or social media. Using different mediums of information, one gets to know what's happening in the world, in his country or nearby town. The concept of global village emerged totally due to media (Marshal McLuhan, 1962, The Gutenberg Galaxy). In any society, democratic ideals such as transparent and accountable governance, as well as responsible citizenry are largely promoted by the quality and professionalism of media. The media are traditionally believed to be the source of informing, educating and entertaining the public in modern democratic society (Pasti S., 2005). In a world where media is one of the most powerful entities, the access of every kind of content to everyone regardless of age and gender has created some complications. Where there is a need of hour to spread useful information through media there is also a need of quality control of the contents shown on our television sets (Nasidi 2016). In this regard, Strömbäck and Karlsson (2011) find that,



although, role of journalists in news content has decreased in first decade of twenty-first century due to latest technological and ownership transformations in the media industry, however, still the most dominant role in news content is of the journalists. Ethics play an important role in a men's life. Ethics are the crucial part of one's character and define the true values of life.

**Ethics:** According to Stephen J. A. Ward Ethics comes from Greek word “ethos” meaning “character”, “nature” or “disposition” roughly how someone is disposed to act. This notion is close to the common idea of ethics as an internal matter of virtuous character that motivates people to act correctly. The etymology of ethics and morality suggests that ethics is both individualistic and social. It is individualistic because individuals are asked to make certain values part of their character and to use certain norms in making decisions. It is social as correct conduct is honoring rules of fair social interaction, rules that apply to humans in general or to all members of a group.

**Media ethics:** Media ethics, such as what kinds of topics to cover, balance, accuracy, truthfulness, impartiality, fairness and the respect of individuals privacy act as crucial leading principles to maintain the uprightness of news content. Pasti (2005) argues that younger and older journalists make decisions differently when they caught in ethical dilemmas and, thus, emphasizes the importance of demographic factors in decision making of journalist to deliver which kind of information. In this sphere, other scholars have emphasized the importance of factors such as journalists' education, experience and attitude towards profession, among others.

**Pakistani media:** Over the last decade, Pakistani media has experienced startling changes due to the factors such as liberalized media policy introduced by the government in 2002, technological advancements in media industry, and increased awareness among young individuals due to the increase in literacy rate and university education. As a result of liberalized media policy, many private TV news channels have been licensed. These channels are in head-to-head competition in newly established immature electronic media industry. Although some particular television news channels are comparatively better than the others in professional ethics, but overall there exists many gaps (Arshad, Sidra & Ashraf, Badar Nadeem 2014).

**Reasons behind the emergence of private news channels:** The first step in introducing media laws in the country was done by the then military ruler Field Martial Ayub Khan who promulgated the Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO) in 1962. The law empowered the authorities to seize newspapers, close down news providers and arrest journalists. Using these laws, Ayub Khan nationalised large parts of the press and took over one of the two largest news agencies. The other agencies were pushed into severe crisis where had to seek financial support from the government. Pakistan Radio and TV, which was established in mid-1960's was also brought under the strict control of the government. Since independence in 1947 the electronic media in Pakistan remained dominated by the state-run Pakistan Television and Pakistan Broadcasting Corporations. Pakistan Television was launched in November 1964



which switched over to colour transmission 12 years later. More discordant additions were made to the PPO during the reign of General Zia Haq in the 1980's. According to these new amendments, the publisher 16 International Media Support, description of the media landscape would be liable and prosecuted if a story was not to the liking of the administration even if it was factual and of national interest. These amendments were used to promote Haq's Islamist leanings and demonstrated the alliance between the military and religious leaders. Censorship during the Zia years was direct, concrete and dictatorial. Newspapers were scrutinised; critical or undesired sections of an article censored. In the wake of Zia Haq's sudden death and the return of democracy, the way was paved to wane the discordant media laws through a revision of media legislation called the Revised PPO (RPPO).

**Liberalized media:** From 2002, under General Musharraf, media faced a decisive development that would lead to a boom in Pakistani electronic media. New liberal media laws broke the state's monopoly on electronic media. TV broadcasting and FM radio licenses were issued to private media outlets. The military's motivation for liberalising media licensing was based on an assumption that Pakistani media could be used to strengthen national security and counter the threat from India. What prompted this shift was the military's experience during two past confrontations with India. One was the Kargil War and the other was the hijacking of the Indian Airliner by Pakistani based militants. In both these instances, the Pakistani military felt that it had lost the media war to India. The government, intelligentsia, the security agencies and the military were of the view that Pakistan was left with no options to reciprocate because its electronic media were inferior to that of Indian. Better electronic media capacity was needed in the future and thus the market for electronic media was liberalised. The justification was just as much a desire to counter Indian media power, as it was a wish to set the media "free" with the rights that electronic media had in liberal, open societies (IMS 2009).

**PEMRA:** PEMRA is a regulatory body in Pakistan established in 2002 to regulate the private electronic media. Its goal is to improve the standards of information and education and provide a wider range of choices for the people of Pakistan, including news, current affairs, and various forms of knowledge. PEMRA is responsible for devolving power to the local level and ensuring accountability, transparency, and good governance through the optimization of free flow of information.

**PEMRA code of conduct, article 8:** PEMRA code of conduct 2015 consists of 24 articles. The article 8 is about the coverage of incidents of accidents, violence and crimes that relates to the topic of this study.

1. Coverage of incidents of accidents, violence and crimes shall not incite, glamorize or in any way promote violence or antisocial behavior in such coverage does not prejudice the success of an ongoing security operation.
2. Appropriate warning shall be given upfront for content which may be potentially disturbing or upsetting so as to enable viewers to make an informed choice.
3. Scenes with violence or sufferings such as close up shots of person mutually, torture or killed shall not be shown.



4. Reporting of incidents of crime accidents, natural disaster or violence does not create hurdles in dispensation of the duties of the law enforcement agencies, rescue, hospitals and doctors etc
5. Extreme cautions shall be exercised in handling themes, clots or scenes that depict sex, offence and violence including rape and other sexual assaults.
6. Identity of any victim of rape, sexual abuse, terrorism or kidnapping or such victim family shall not be revealed without prior permission of the victim or victim's guardian where victim is a minor.

### **Research objectives:**

This thesis seeks to comprehend media ethics. Main focus is the observance of ethics in headlines and news reports related to crime and violence. Emphasis is given on news headlines as many people due to the lack of time may not watch the detailed news instead they watch headlines as news headlines are the reflector of the whole story.

- To find the Psychological effects of violence news
- Role of crime news in presenting political and diplomatic image of Pakistan to the world
- To find the link between crime news and rating of a channel
- To seek the role of responsible journalism as concerned for news bulletins

### **Research Questions**

#### **Research questions from crime reporters**

1. Do you think media ethics are followed during crime news reporting?
2. On daily basis more than 1 crime news is presented on news bulletin and crime scenes often shown. By this kind of reporting what image of Pakistan is shown to the world? Does European media also has this kind of freedom in the reporting of crime news?
3. How the situation can be made better?
4. Do you think crime news and ratings are interlinked?
5. Do you think domestic violence and other crime news are prioritized because people take more interest in such news?
6. In your opinion what should be the role of a responsible journalist and in relation to that what is the responsibility of a private news channel?

#### **Research questions**

##### **Research questions from psychologists**

1. Do you think news have an impact on the psyche of people? Are people influenced by what they watch?
2. Does crime news equally affect men, women and different age groups?
3. How visuals of crime scenes psychologically affect masses and different age groups?
4. Do you think domestic violence and other violent scenes shown on news help to make society better or have a negative impact on people? Do such news cause depression?
5. Do such news create awareness or instead spread fear among masses and they might think their country is not a safe place to live?
6. What are your suggestions to make the situation better?



### **Literature review**

Since media has become widespread, emphasis has been given on ethics. Many researcher and scholars have carried out researches on media ethics and many studies are under observation to comprehend the importance of ethics in national and international media and to emphasis on the implications these ethics as media is the reflector of society and in an alternate manner society is the reflector of media. A research report was written by veteran journalist Eugene L. Meyer from Ohio State University who is an award-winning Washington, DC-based freelance journalist. The report was sent to CIMA (center for international media assistance) on November, 2011. The topic of the report is Media Codes of Ethics mainly focusing on the difficulty of defining standards. The report figures out how codes of ethics can serve to raise journalistic standards and what challenges journalists face in trying to live up to them, especially in countries where news media are not free or where practicing independent journalism can be difficult. This study is based on more than 20 interviews by telephone, e-mail, and Skype; primary and secondary documents; commentaries; websites; blogs; and other sources. Eugene concluded that Journalists should be honest, fair, and courageous in gathering, reporting, and interpreting information. (L.meyer 2011) Another research journal is written by Stephen on global journalism ethics (2008). He argued that a major task of journalism ethics is to construct a more non-parochial ethics. The discussion presented charts to explain the role of parochialism and the limits of theorizing in journalism ethics. The result indicates that the future of journalism would be improved if we put new knowledge into journalism from outside of journalism ethics. (Ward J.A. 2008) Another research on media ethics, “A call to responsible journalism” was carried out in Malawi a south African country at the Malawi Electoral Commission “Stringer” Training Course by the Executive Director, and Media Council of Malawi (2008). The research focuses on the ethical code of conduct that helps in the establishment of responsible media. According to the findings of the research, irresponsible journalism brings restriction, taking away media freedom, professional conduct and ethical practice that ensure public trust. (Chiyamwaka 2008) A research is done by David Chalaganidze from State University of New York on the topic of International Journalistic Ethics and Russian Journalis (2015). The main objective of the research is to gather information about the state of journalism in the Russian Federation and what obstacles Russian journalists are encountering on daily basis. Research is based on different interviews. The researcher concluded that in case of Russian journalism one of the ways to make journalism fair and impartial is to provide moral and financial support to the journalists who are working in Russia and also, to help future journalists to learn the responsibility of a journalist to do his or her work in an objective manner. (Chalaganidze 2015)

A research by Sidra Arshad and Badar Nadeem Ashraf from China University of Geosciences on journalism ethics targeting media industry of Pakistan and is of the opinion that after the implementation of more liberalized media policy (2002), media in Pakistan has got more freedom and voice but many gaps exist in actual media practices regarding ethical behavior. Findings of the research suggest that the immature private TV news channels and competitive print media sectors lack many basic professional ethics of journalism and there is a need to improve them to justify their liberalization. (Arshad, Ashraf 2002) A research on media





ethics was written by N. Nahida Begum from department of political science, University of Bangalore, India on January 2014. The purpose of the paper is to explain media role as the “fourth state of government”. Different perspective of ethics comprising views of Aristotle, Machiavelli, Immanuel Kant, J S Mill, Rawls and Mahatma Gandhi are also considered. The methodology used here is philosophical and analytical. The findings of the research is that many problems like, terrorism, unemployment and poverty can be minimized with the help of free and responsible press as media can do wonders. (Begum 2014). A research is carried out on Media Ethics in Pakistani perspective by Rameez, Sajjad and Mukhtiar of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Pakistan on October 2018. After highlighting the importance of media to convey information to masses, paper focuses on the regulations that inclusively form the press system. Philosophical and analytical methodology has been used in the study. The result of the research indicates that many problems like terrorism, unemployment and poverty can be resolved by the socially responsible journalism. (Mahesar, Rameez, Ali Qazi, Sajjad & Ali Jamali, Mukhtiar 2018)

### **Theoretical framework**

Keeping in mind the details of the study, it is framed under the social responsibility theory. The theory lies between both authoritarian theory and libertarian theory because it gives total media freedom in one hand but the external controls in other hand.

### **Social responsibility theory**

According to Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, “Freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right, as under pure libertarian theory. One’s right to free expression must be balanced against the private rights of others and against vital society interest.”

**Explanation:** The study comes under the social responsibility theory of media as Pakistani media follows this theory. Here the press ownership is private. It allows free press without any censorship but at the same time the content of the press should be discussed in public panel and media should accept any obligation from public interference or professional self regulations or both. The social responsibility theory have changed journalism from simple “Objective” reporting (facts reporting) to “Interpretative” reporting (investigative reporting). The total news is complete facts and truthful but the commission of the freedom press stated that “No longer giving facts truthfully rather than give a necessary analyzed or interpretative report on facts with clear explanations”.

The theory helped in developing professionalism in media by setting up a high level of accuracy, truth, and information. The commission of press council also included some tasks based on social responsibility of media, which are as follows:

1. Formulate the code of conduct for the press.
2. Improve the standards of journalism.
3. Safeguarding the interests of journalism and journalist.
4. Criticize and make some penalty for violating the code of conduct.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used here is in-depth interview method. For the psychological questions psychologists are considered while the rest of the questions are asked from journalists. Open ended questions were asked from the interviewees.

### In-depth interview method

In-depth interviews are a qualitative data collection method that includes direct, one-on-one engagement with individual participant. In-depth interviewing can take place face-to-face as well as over the phone. However, for the latter to be effective and to convey reliable information, the interviewer must be highly skilled to prevent data loss. Therefore interviews for the research are taken through the social media app (whatsapp).

### Sampling method

Sampling technique used here is purposive sampling. This method was selected because experienced and professionals of the field were required for the research questions and sampling was done according to the purpose of the research.

Demographic details of respondents

	Main Method	Name	News channel/ currently working as	Designation	Interview Duration	Type of Questions	Tool used for interview
1	Interview	Kamil Arif	ARY	Crime reporter	1 hour	Open ended	whatsapp
2	Interview	Amir Majeed	SAMA	Crime reporter	1 hour	Open ended	whatsapp
3	Interview	Talha Hashmi	GEO	Crime reporter	20 min	Open ended	whatsapp
4	Interview	Taha Obaidi	92 HD	Crime reporter	30 min	Open ended	whatsapp
5	Interview	Zohaib jiaja	92 HD	Crime reporter	20 min	Open ended	whatsapp
6	Interview	Dr Sajda	Clinical Psychologist	Psychologist	40 min	Open ended	whatsapp
7	Interview	Khurram Amanullah	Humanistic counselor (CPCAB-UK)	Psychologist	10 min	Open ended	whatsapp



8	Interview	Batool Baqar	Humanistic Counselor (CPCAB-UK)	Psychologist	40 min	Open ended	whatsapp
9	Interview	Maria	Teacher trainer	Psychologist	15 min	Open ended	whatsapp
10	Interview	Fazila Mehdi	Clinical psychologist	Psychologist	30 min	Open ended	whatsapp

### Hypothesis

1. Frequent coverage of crime news on news bulletin has a negative impact on the minds of viewers.
2. Daily reporting of different crimes and visuals of the crime scenes is portraying a negative image of Pakistan to the world.

### Findings

Findings of the research are based on the interviews taken from crime reporters and psychologists. 5 crime reporters from ARY, SAMA, GEO and 92 HD are considered while 5 psychologists from different backgrounds were used for the interview to complete study.

### 3. DISCUSSIONS

Media ethics play a vital role in delivering the news story. For the objectives of the research interview method was adopted and therefore questions were asked in accordance to the hypothesis. Different journalists were asked the same questions. Some were of the view point that media ethics are being followed in big news channels but neglected in smaller ones. In past there was a prominent lack in the observance of ethics in private news channels however the situation has been improved now, still there are flaws in the delivery of crime news. Mr. Talha Hashmi from Geo news also told that the care about media ethics is usually taken but there are some reporters who only concern about getting on air, in this case the situation gets changed and then media ethics get compromised. Many journalists accepted that rating of a channel is closely related to the crime news including national, international crimes and domestic violence. People take more interest in such news and therefore channels create exaggeration while delivering the news content. In order to break the news first and win the competition news channels break every kind of news ignoring the age and gender of viewers. Watching crime content with embellishment causes fear and depression among masses. However such news create awareness but have their side effects as well. According to Mr. Kamil Arif, currently working in ARY news, media's job is to reflect the reality. People should know the truth and media is not responsible for what people prescribe through crime news as its duty of news channel to deliver the real picture of society and aware masses about what's going in the country as Media is the mirror of its society. While discussing the effects of crime news with psychologists we conclude that crime news do the work of educating





people but have their negative effects also. Ms Fazila Mehdi says that All the shows related to domestic violence depend upon the person who is conducting the show that how he/she delivers the news. Overall such shows have raised awareness among people that what actually is happening and if they encounter something similar, who are the ones they should approach. Previously people didn't even know that domestic violence is a crime and it should be reported and even if a person who is going through it cannot raise his/her voice they now know that it is wrong.

When men and particularly women and children see crime scenes, violence, bloodshed, harassment cases and domestic conflicts, they go through a feeling of isolation and fear from the external world. Immature minds of toddlers are unable to digest such news and unknowingly it affects their personality too. In a question asked from Dr Sajida Hassan regarding effects of crime news she told that television violence affects individuals of all ages, of both genders, at all socio-economic levels and all levels of society. Even children exposed to violent content through cartoon on children's TV shows can learn aggressive behavior and attitudes. Media violence can desensitize adults as well as children to real-world issues and associating violent exposure with thrill seeking behaviour. Primarily, the psychological processes of behaviour development of children rely on learning with observation, and with frequent exposure to specific violent media content, the cognitive, emotional and perceptual responses can be compromised. When crime news go on air on different channels without being censored, they grab the attention of foreign media. As our media is free to much extent and foreign media is restricted to some extent i.e mostly controlled by external hands or government, therefore when they observe crime content on our local channels they got a chance to portray a negative image of Pakistan to the world. Almost every news bulletin consists of one crime news on daily basis and there is no control on the repetition of same news with different voice tones and words that causes exaggeration, giving a negative image of our country and nation to other nations on the globe.

According to Mr. Amir Majeed from SAMA "When crime stories get on aired it gives a negative image of Pakistan worldwide as other countries especially neighboring ones keep an eye on the inner matters of a country but the problem will not get solved until a policy is designed, until the government restricts the media about what has to get on aired and what has to be not and to what extent a crime has to be delivered. There has to be limit and a measure." Similarly Mr. Zohaib Jiaja from 92 HD, says Pakistan's media is free and by on airing criminal and violent stories, a bad image of our country gets displayed worldwide. Now PEMRA has become activated in introducing new policies regarding the reporting of crime news and is now trying to maintain a proper check and balance system. In other countries, a joint investigative reports are first formulated in case of big incidents and then they get delivered to the public after passing different measures. Ms Batool Zaidi in repose to a question asked related to the psyche of people said "crime news do create awareness but if shown in correct proportion, but if all the 100s of news channels show just these news 24/7 then it's more than just creating awareness, it's leading to create paranoia (extreme fear) in the society. The security cameras that used to be just at the high security areas now people are placing them in front of their houses too because of the extreme fear.people carrying two



phones one cheap and other expensive in order to prevent big loss in case of snatching Etc . This situation is extremely damaging ones mental peace and ability to live and be professionally productive in this city. Most of the highly qualified professionals have relocated/moved abroad due to this insecure-unsafe environment in Pakistan, unfortunately.”

The thing which is important is that how the situation can be made better. Suggestions were taken from both the psychologists and journalists improve the situation. Ms Batool Baqir suggested that news channels have to show good side as well as the low side of our country in the right proportion and do not create the re-enactment shows of crime because the damage caused by them psychologically is beyond measure and cannot be neglected for the overall wellbeing and safety of citizens. Ms. Fazila Mehdi counselor as well as clinical psychologist put forward that shows which deliver criminal and violent news should take care in the selection of their words and host. Such words should not be used excessively which can induce fear and anger among people and the problem about which the show has been conducted should give a solution to it in the end as open ended shows can create confusion in people that if there is a problem like that then what could be the solution and they can also perceive a negative conclusion or answer from it. Also when violent crimes are getting on air then it should show repeatedly that children and people of weak heart should not watch it. There should be some measures and balance in showing news. Mr Amir Majeed said in order to make the present situation better, the law enforcement agencies have to form new laws and the existing laws have to be enforced effectively then the situation will automatically get better. Otherwise if the media has given full freedom that anyone can report and deliver every kind of news then problems will arise. As in 2002 when Electronic media came into being and Pakistan’s situation wasn’t good, at that time bloodshed was shown openly but now this thing has diminished and no bloodshed gets on aired but PEMRA or the newly formed institute has to take action against remaining problems associated with crime reporting by news channels and they have to be made compliant in showing minimum of violent crimes and violence related scenes.

Hence by the whole discussion including the questions asked from journalists and psychologists it is clear that both hypotheses have been proved. Frequent coverage of crime news on news bulletin has a negative impact on the minds of viewers. Daily reporting of different crimes and visuals of the crime scenes is portraying a negative image of Pakistan to the world. From the whole discussion we also get to know the importance of the job of a reporter along with the news channel as journalists and reporters are the heart and soul of a channel and people’s perception depends on the way they deliver the news story. Mr. Taha Obaidi from 92 HD is of the point of view that the role of a journalist is very important in reporting different crimes as he/she is always in close contact with the crime scene i.e. if a target killing occurs or a bomb blast, he always sees the crime scene from close, thus, it is the duty of a journalist to evaluate the outcome of the news and also assess that how should he report the news that it will have minimum negative impact on society. Mr Kamil Arif from ARY news describes about the responsibility of journalist as” Pakistan is always our first priority, its image is the first priority so if there is news other than terrorist attacks and it can cause harm to the image of a country then the media should filter it. A responsible reporter



has the duty to confirm his\her news, make it mature and then deliver it to the public as the citizens are not actually aware of what is happening in their country and worldwide so the reporter has to deliver correct news and in this sense the work of a reporter is very sensitive. If a reporter passes on right and authentic news then people will be able to make right decision for the concerned matter and if we misguide them then they will make their mind in the same sense. Thus, a reporter has to be very responsible and he/she should show a mature behavior.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The role of media ethics in crime news reporting in Pakistan is important for building the thoughts and perceptions of society. The frequent coverage of crime news on news bulletins has a negative impact on the minds of viewers and presents a negative image of the country to the world. The duty of the media, including private news channels, is to aware the masses about the incidents happening around the globe without exaggeration and to deliver the truth. The principles of responsible journalism must be taught to journalists to avoid further flaws in the future and PEMRA should take notice of the news channels' policy to ensure that the truth is delivered to the public in an appropriate manner. The core responsibility of news channels and journalists should be the goodwill of Pakistan and the Pakistani nation, rather than rating and advertising. Hence by the whole discussion including the questions asked from journalists and psychologists it is clear that both hypotheses have been proved. Frequent coverage of crime news on news bulletin has a negative impact on the minds of viewers. Daily reporting of different crimes and visuals of the crime scenes is portraying a negative image of Pakistan to the world.

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