

Conflict and Peace Journalism: Role of Media in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the reporting of major conflicts in Pakistan by two leading TV channels i.e. Geo TV and Dunya TV, to ascertain the nature of the coverage in terms of being escalatory or de-escalatory. It aims to explore these conflicts from a peace journalism perspective. The conflicts include: the Taliban conflict, Balochistan conflict, sectarian conflict and ethno-political conflict in Karachi. The study is primarily a quantitative content analysis to explore the media coverage of conflicts during both high and low intensity periods from 2014 to 2015. The findings suggest that Pakistan news TV channels reported the Taliban and the ethno-political conflict in Karachi in an escalatory fashion, ridden in a de-contextualised pattern. While, on the other hand, the Balochistan and the sectarian conflict were mainly reported in de-escalatory terms owing to various socio-cultural reasons impacting the coverage. The findings are quite consistent with the existing literature on conflict journalism, which suggests that the media, in general, adopts a more propagandist and nationalistic stance, when the threats to national security are highest whereas it adopts a more humanistic stance, when the threats to national security are assumed to be low.

Keywords: Conflict Journalism, National Security, Elite Dissensus, Escalatory Coverage, Politicisation, Securitisation.

Introduction

The 70-year history of Pakistan is marred by a number of political and security conflicts which have worsened with the passage of time. These

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conflicts include: the Taliban conflict between the Pakistan Army and Taliban fighters; the conflict in Balochistan between the Pakistan Army and Baloch separatists; the sectarian conflict between the Shia and Sunni sects and the ethno-political conflicts in Karachi between three different ethnic communities — the Urdu-speaking Mohajir community, Sindhi and Pashto speaking people. While there is a great deal of concern about these intense conflicts both nationally and internationally, the Pakistani media thrives on these conflicts to gain high ratings.¹ A similar trend has been also noted in the Indian media while reporting the Mumbai attacks in 2008.²

Many mass communication experts believe that dependency on media increases during conflict times and hence greater media effects on audiences.³ This study largely aims to explore how different disputes are reported, what themes are prioritised and what factors determine the nature of coverage through the war and peace journalism perspectives. Conflict journalism is influenced by an array of factors including national interests, professional and commercial constraints and public opinion.⁴ The scope of this study lies in unpacking this mix and delineating the key determinants that characterise reporting of these conflicts. Before analysing the existing literature, it is pertinent to provide a brief note on the nature of each of these four conflicts. Although, a more neutral and objective assessment of these disputes is difficult to find, this study attempts to highlight the main stakeholders and their interests.

¹ Shabbir Hussain, “Critical Academic Junctures between Political Communication and Peace Journalism in Pakistan,” *Global Media Journal*, Mediterranean Edition 10(2) (2015): 1-21.

² M. Zubair Iqbal, “The media-terrorism Symbiosis: a casestudy of Mumbai Attacks, 2008,” *Asian Journal of Communication* 25(2) (2015): 197-212

³ Vlamidir Bratić, “Media Effects during Violent Conflict: Evaluating Media Contributions to Peace Building,” *Conflict & Communication Online* 5,1 (2006); 1-11.

⁴ Daniel C. Hallin,+ “The Media and War,” in *International Media Research: Critical Survey*, eds., Corner, H., Schlesinger, P. And Silverston, G. (Routledge, London & New York).

Taliban Conflict

The Taliban conflict started in the North-West of Pakistan in 2004, when after the US invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan was pressured by the Western powers to check cross-border infiltration of Taliban fighters.⁵ When Pakistan stationed its forces in the region, the tribal people and sympathisers of Taliban were offended, therefore, they started agitation. The government started military operations against the militant groups who announced their support for the Taliban in Afghanistan. Even now, after 13 years, the situation is still grim in the tribal regions. So far, more than 60,000 people have been killed in this conflict while the deaths in tribal regions are unaccounted.⁶ There have been several attempts to resolve this conflict peacefully, however, the efforts ended in failure due to multiple reasons. Since the initiation of operation *Zarb-e-Azb*, the Pakistani military has successfully pushed the Taliban fighters to the Afghan border and secured most of the tribal areas. However, a number of key problems need to be addressed to ensure durable peace in the region like the internally-displaced people need rehabilitation and reconstruction of the infrastructure and businesses.

Balochistan Conflict

By area, Balochistan is the largest western province of Pakistan although its population is only a fraction of the total population of Pakistan. After the creation of Pakistan, the ruling dynasty refused to accede to Pakistan but was persuaded to integrate into the mainstream, when guaranteed full autonomy.⁷ The situation worsened in the 1970s when the federal government staged a military operation against the Baloch insurgents, who were working against the national interests. Since the 1990s, the conflict was almost buried and Baloch nationalists became part of national politics.⁸ The conflict was revived in 2006, when Nawab Akbar

⁵ Shabbir Hussain, "Reporting Terror: Why Voices of Peace are Unheard?," *Conflict & Communication Online* 13 (2014): 1.

⁶ Shabbir Hussain, "Media Coverage of Taliban: is Peace Journalism the Solution?," *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 26 (1) (2016): 1-15.

⁷ M. A. Kundi, "The Tribal Set-up and Elections in Balochistan," in Hasnat, F. S & Faruqui, A., eds., *Pakistan: Unresolved Issues of State and Society* (Vanguard Publications).

⁸ Shabbir Hussain and Haseeb ur Rehman, "Balochistan Conflict: Reaping Benefits of Peace Journalism," *Conflict & Communication Online* 14(20) (2015): 1-12.

Bugti, a Baloch chieftain, was killed by the military forces of Pakistan for his alleged anti-Pakistan stance.

The root cause of unrest in Balochistan lies in the realisation among the people that their resources are being exploited without giving any benefit to them.⁹ The nationalists often cite the example of the Sui gas facility. The reservoirs of Sui natural gas were discovered in 1952, and the facility was extended throughout the country, but the only district in Balochistan to receive a gas facility was Quetta in 1986, and that, too, was limited to the cantonment areas. Likewise, with other minerals that are being extracted, the centre gets a major share of the profits and the province languishes in poverty and economic deprivation. Nonetheless, the political and economic grievances are eminently resolvable, for example by giving greater devolution; permitting Balochistan to control its natural resources, including fixing the price at which these commodities sell; investing in human resource development and expanding access to electricity and gas.¹⁰

Ethno-political Conflict in Karachi

The ethno-political conflict in Sindh province can be traced back to the partition of Pakistan, when the migrants, coming from India, started to settle in Karachi and soon the Urdu-speaking settlers became the largest community of the city. With the passage of time, people from north-western parts of the country also moved to the city for better economic opportunities. The ethno-political tension started with the formation of Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) in 1985, aimed at securing the rights of Urdu-speaking settlers.¹¹ Other political parties including the Awami National Party (ANP) became active to gain support of Pashtoon settlers from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and tribal areas, and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) started championing the cause of local Sindhi and Balochi people. The first ethnic tension gripped the city in 1985, followed by tension in 1988, 1992 and 1996.¹² After these sporadic tensions, the ethnic conflict, inflamed by political interests, became a norm and the

⁹ Hussain and Rehman, 2015.

¹⁰ Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan at the Crosscurrent of History* (Lahore, Vanguard Books, 2004).

¹¹ Ziring, 2004.

¹² Ziring.

city was divided into three parts, owing to the relative strength of these three communities. Urdu-speaking settlers have been the largest community and enjoyed a monopoly on the city's resources, followed by local Sindhi and Pashtoon. Since Karachi is the economic hub of Pakistan, it is home to all the major media outlets in Pakistan and events happening here get a major share of media attention.

Sectarian Conflict

Pakistan tops the list of Muslim countries where sectarianism is on the rise. In fact, many fear that, although the ongoing war on terror in the tribal regions of the country may soon be over, the sectarian conflict between the two dominant sects of Islam (Sunni and Shia) would continue to gnawing at the social fabric for years to come.¹³

Sectarianism is loosely connected with other religious conflicts in Pakistan. In fact, the role of religion in state affairs has always been controversial and spurred many other conflicts. For example, after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, there were disagreements whether the country should be declared as an Islamic state or as a secular state. Similarly, the religious reforms of the first military dictator General Ayub Khan in the 1960s were opposed on religious lines. Likewise, Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, had to declare Ahmedis (a small religious sect) as non-Muslims in 1970s to get popular support. The military dictator General Zia ul Haq initiated Islamisation policies to extend his stay in power in 1980s, and the last military dictator General Pervez Musharraf gave his vision of enlightened moderation to appease West after the 9/11 incident. It is generally agreed that Islam as a religion is not a problem (about 97 per cent are Muslims), but its implementation is problematic.¹⁴ While the Islamists present Islam as an integral part of national polity, the secularists fear its implementation will promote orthodoxy and theocracy in the country. However, many believe that the tension between Islamists and secularists has little to do with sectarianism rather they relate it to the regional rivalry between Sunni

¹³ M. A. Zahab, "It's Just a Sunni-Shiite Thing," in *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*: 179.

¹⁴ A. S. Hashmi, "Use of Religion in Violent Conflicts by Authoritarian Regimes: Pakistan and Malaysia in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 30 (4) (2007): 22.

Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran.¹⁵

Researchers like Zahab links the sectarian conflict with the overall socio-political and economic milieu.¹⁶ Many sectarian groups are registered as political parties and have minor political base. These groups provide political space for people who are excluded from politics due to dominance of landlords and businessmen in the peculiar political system in Pakistan. The sectarian groups get political support from the religious seminaries. The mushroom growth of these seminaries is due to the failure of the state for not providing free education and other economic necessities.¹⁷ After 9/11, General Pervez Musharraf banned six militant organisations, but they resurfaced with new names and their clandestine activities are now an open secret.

The sectarian conflict has caused irreparable damage to Pakistani society. The suicide attacks at religious places of both Sunnis and Shias have deepened sectarian divisions and posed serious threats to national security and integrity. At times, even the government functionaries tried to exploit the conflict for political interests instead of taking strong action against the culprits.

War-media Symbiosis

The existing scholarship on the war-media relationship reveals that media escalate conflicts for nationalistic and professional reasons.¹⁸ On the other hand, extended reporting of conflict helps the warring parties to propagate their desired aims. This aspect of the war-media relationship is characterised as symbiotic.¹⁹ Although the renowned conflict journalism researcher Daniel Hallin²⁰ believes that this nexus has not yet been completely theorised. Excellent commentaries are available on the media's role during the two world wars, the entire Cold War era, US intervention in Vietnam and Latin America, the Middle East, Iraq and

¹⁵ Hashmi, 2007.

¹⁶ Zahab, 2013.

¹⁷ Hashmi, 2007.

¹⁸ S. D. Ross, "Peace Journalism: Constructive Media in a Global Community," *Global Media Journal*, Mediterranean Edition 2 (2) (2007): 77-81.

¹⁹ Iqbal, "The media-terrorism Symbiosis."

²⁰ Hallin, "The Media and War."

Afghanistan,²¹ to mention a few episodes. The relationship may have been generally explored, however, “the problem does not lie in why the media covers [sic] terrorism but lies in how the media covers [sic] terrorism (original emphasis).”²²

The realisation that media can be used for peace purposes is as old as the fear of its ability to inflame conflicts. During the first quarter of the 20th century, the *Nation Radio* was set by the League of Nations to promote peace and harmony in Europe. Its successor, the United Nations (UN), also established crisis radios in the troubled region of Africa to promote peace and tranquillity.²³ Likewise, there is a growing list of peace media outlets in modern times to help stem violence and suggest ways and means to resolve conflicts. But, barring these few examples, during conflict times, generally, national media go hand-in-hand with other government institutions to win support for the war and demonise the enemy.²⁴ In the case of Pakistan, both the military and government have used the media to advance their perspectives in the War on Terror.²⁵ In case of the US, researchers have studied the excessive use of the media for promoting national interests during the two world wars, Vietnam invasion and the Latin American states, the entire Cold War with the USSR and in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan with optimum success.²⁶ Ottosen, in his book *The War in Afghanistan and Peace Journalism in Practice* published in 2010,²⁷ found that from 1980 to 1990, Norwegian newspapers used enemy images and corresponded with the Norwegian foreign policy. The media were ready to sacrifice their

²¹ J. Lynch, “What’s so Great about Peace Journalism,” *Global Media Journal*, Mediterranean Edition 1(1) (2006): 74-87.

²² Iqbal, “The Media-terrorism Symbiosis.”

²³ J. Becker, “Contributions by the Media to Crisis Prevention and Conflict Settlement,” *Conflict and Communication Online* 3(1/2) (2007).

²⁴ R. Hay, “The Media and Peacebuilding,” Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS), a Discussion Paper and Draft Operational Framework, Vancouver und Ottawa.

²⁵ Shabbir Hussain, “War Media Galore in Pakistan: A Perspective on Taliban Conflict,” *Global Media Journal*, Pakistan Edition, 5 (2012): 1 ; Shabbir Hussain, “Reporting terror: Why voices of peace are unheard?,” *Conflict & Communication Online* (13), 1.

²⁶ E. S. Herman, and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).

²⁷ R. Ottosen, “The War in Afghanistan and Peace Journalism in Practice,” *Media, War & Conflict* 3(3) (2010): 261-278.

editorial independence for patriotism. Others including Shinar²⁸ investigated media coverage that sided with the West's policy towards the Middle East.

Disagreeing with the traditional media approach, critical scholars have developed the peace journalism approach.²⁹ Peace journalism stresses that journalists must be conscious of the consequences of reportage (even if facts are reported), which can be achieved if journalists try to understand the political, economic and social factors that fuel conflicts, and present them in broader perspective.³⁰ Although the media can never resolve conflicts by themselves, however, by presenting conflicts in a broader perspective, they can perhaps diffuse tensions.³¹ The advocates of peace journalism equate it with good journalism during conflict times as it offers a detailed, balanced and fairer approach. The prime concern of peace journalism is to enable all the stakeholders in a conflict to share their viewpoints. It calls for a multi-perspectival, contextualised and people-centric journalism. Peace journalism utilises all the existing tools of journalism to responsibly inform the people about the conduct of wars and promotes peace and harmony.

Adopting peace journalism as a theoretical framework, this study is mainly designed to investigate how leading TV news channels in Pakistan report on the four deadly conflicts. The authors believe that this study is significant for two reasons: first, the traditional scholarship on conflict journalism is mainly written from the Western perspective, so there is a need for a more de-Westernised approach. Secondly, researchers mainly focus on international conflicts and ignore the reporting of national conflicts, therefore, this study aims at analysing the reporting of the national conflicts. Keeping in mind these considerations, the three main research questions have been formulated: a) Judging from the perspective of war/peace journalism, how did the *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV* report the four conflicts in Pakistan? b) What are the key thematic

²⁸ D. Shinar, "Epilogue: Peace Journalism – The State of the Art," *Conflict and Communication Online* 3(1-2) (2007).

²⁹ W. Kempf, "Conflict Coverage and Conflict Escalation," in Kempf, W., Luostarinen, H. eds., *Journalism and the New World Order*, II ; "Studying War and the Media," *Göteborg*, Nordicom: 59-72.

³⁰ J. Galtung, "The Task of Peace Journalism," *Ethical Perspectives* 7(2) (2005): 162-167.

³¹ J. Lynch, and A. McGoldrick, "Peace Journalism," Hawthorn Press Stroud (2005).

frames that characterise the reporting of these four conflicts by *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV*? c) What are the similarities and differences among the key discursive strategies that *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV* apply to report the four conflicts?

Research Methodology

The content analysis technique is applied in this study, which is a systematic and empirical investigation of a phenomenon by attributing quantitative values to the key variables. The researchers selected two leading news channels of Pakistan, *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV*, for this study. The time period for the study was one year, from November 2014 till October 2015. The reason for selecting this period was that many important events happened during this period of time, when it comes to these four conflicts. Regarding the Taliban conflict, the government announced a peace agreement with the Taliban fighters, but then soon launched a military operation against them, when it realised the Taliban could not be easily appeased. So, it is interesting to discuss how the media behaved during this whole time period. With regard to the conflict in Balochistan, the Supreme Court of Pakistan took a *suo moto* notice of disappearances of Baloch youth and asked the government to improve the situation there. Similarly, there was a surge in ethnic violence in Karachi during the stipulated time, and media attempts to defuse tension in the city. Finally, there were many sectarian deaths during this time period, when the lull in violence was broken during the holy month of Moharram (religious occasion for Shia Muslims commemorating the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson).

Since the original model of war and peace journalism by the Norwegian peace researcher Johan Galtung is mainly developed in the Western settings, it does not cover aspects of journalistic cultures in de-westernised contexts.³² Therefore, researchers have modified certain aspects of the Galtunic model to make it more relevant to Asian and Islamic contexts.³³ Similarly, for this study, the authors have developed a new model of conflict escalation and de-escalation to accommodate the peculiar features of the four conflicts, although it has been inspired by

³²S. T. Lee and C. C Maslog, "War or Peace Journalism?," *Journal of Communication* 55 (2005, June): 311-329.

³³Shabbir Hussain, "Analysing the War-media Nexus in the Conflict-ridden, Semi-democratic Milieu of Pakistan," *Journal of War, Media & Conflict* (2017).

the original model of Galtung. The dichotomous categories are operationalised by these researchers and four students of Mass Communication department were trained in the coding scheme. Inter-coder reliability tests were conducted and more than 80 per cent consensus was achieved for all categories. For the data collection purpose, only the 9 pm newscasts of the first four days of a week (Monday-Thursday) were selected.

Table No. 1

Context Specific Model of Conflict Escalation and De-Escalation

Reporting of Conflict Escalation	Reporting of Conflict De-escalation
<p>1. Securitisation</p> <p>Conflicts are securitised; they are discussed in terms of threats, dangers, and occupations. Police force, army personnel and elites get the limelight. Conspiracies, issue of national sovereignty, independence, and patriotism are related with the conflict. The system, culture and social values are securitised and feared to be lost if enemy prevails.</p> <p>2. Otherisation</p> <p>Media takes sides in conflicts, one party is treated as ‘other or alien to our culture, and not belonging to ‘us’ and hence dangerous if it prevails. Biasness prevails in media discourse and the whole conflict story is told from one perspective only. Collective fears</p>	<p>1. Humanisation</p> <p>Conflicts are humanised, individual sufferings are highlighted, and trials and tribulation of common people get maximum coverage. Plight of women and children and other vulnerable groups is discussed. Conflict is covered from the perspective of the common people. Loss to the social institutions and local culture is counted and steps urged for their recovery.</p> <p>2. We’ness</p> <p>Conflicting parties are treated in unison; ‘us versus them’ notions are avoided. Contributions of the aggrieved parties for national cause are counted. Responsibility for law and order situation is equally shared. Negative attributes are avoided. Conflict itself is treated as</p>

<p>are aroused and the ‘bad deeds’ of aggressors highlighted to send a message ‘that the whole nation is united against you.’</p> <p>3. Incompatibility</p> <p>Conflict is presented as a tug of war in which interests are incompatible. Compromises are not possible. The parties involved cannot agree on a single agenda and hence doomed for a worst scenario in times ahead. The conflicting parties represent antagonist interests, each hell-bent on prevailing over the other. The antagonist parties stand for different diametrically opposed values where zero-sum orientation prevails.</p> <p>4. Politicisation</p> <p>Ethnic and sectarian affiliations are politicised, the victims belonging to political groups are considered worthy and common people get scant coverage, political wrangling are highlighted. The aggressors and sufferers are identified through their presumed political affiliations; deaths, sufferings, trauma in conflicts are neglected and the emerging conflicting political scenario becomes focus of media attention, where political statements, controversies appear to be the only news. Vested interests of political parties are ignored and media always ready to provide a conduit to blame others, thus creating turmoil.</p>	<p>a problem and efforts urged for solution. Concerns of aggrieved party are shared and violence is explained from a broad range.</p> <p>3. Compatability</p> <p>The commonalities and sameness in the standpoints of conflicting parties are explored and urged for reconciliation. The conflicting parties are encouraged and extolled for overtures that promote dialogue and bring the antagonists closer. History, culture and other interests that forge unity are highlighted. Conflicts are contextualised and mistakes of both sides are exposed for rapprochement.</p> <p>4. De-politicisation</p> <p>Focus on the non-political aspects of conflicts; affiliations like politics, ethnicity, religiosity or other considerations are avoided. The social, cultural and economic costs of conflicts are highlighted. Political shenanigans are exposed in non-political and less sensational tones; The artificial barriers among conflicting groups produced by politicians are scrutinised threadbare, agendas and interests of politicians are exposed, examples of different ethnic and sectarian groups having political affiliations that live peacefully are highlighted.</p>
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<p>5. Sensationalism</p> <p>Conflict reporting is dramatised, and sensationalised; every unfolding event is treated as mysterious, historic and unprecedented; drama and wild outbursts are highlighted. Arguments and counter-arguments of antagonists are the major feeds, where the opposite group is ridiculed and challenged. Future is predicted to be more violent and ominous, no chances for peace overtures.</p>	<p>5. Responsibility</p> <p>Reporters feel responsibility to society, outcomes of unfolding conflicts are given beforehand, damage to society is told and re-told, caution is advised, reporting is devoid of sensationalism, pros and cons of conflicts are presented, and opportunities for peace explored. Contexts and background and root causes of the conflict is presented with an urge for peaceful resolution.</p>
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Research Findings

The researchers have investigated the reporting of four disputes — Taliban conflict, Balochistan conflict, ethno-political conflict and the sectarian conflict – in *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV* for a period of one year. The data was collected by operationalising the categories in a conflict escalation and de-escalation model, developed by the authors of this study. The key findings are presented below by addressing the three main research questions.

First Research Question

Judging from the perspective of war/peace journalism, how did the *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV* report the four conflicts in Pakistan?

Table No.2**Distribution of Conflict Escalation
and De-escalation Coverage**

Types of conflict	Escalatory N(%)	De-escalatory N(%)	Total	P-Value	Chi-Square
Taliban	389(80)	99(20)	488(100)	.00	17.26
Balochistan	169(36)	296(64)	465(100)	.03	22.18
Sectarian	84(33)	169(67)	253(100)	.01	19.34
Ethnic	180(73)	68(27)	248(100)	.00	12.88
Total	822(57)	632(43)	1454(100)	.03	31.28

As shown in the above table, electronic media in Pakistan predominantly reported the four conflicts in escalatory terms. The statistical value (P, 0.03) indicates the difference between the escalatory and de-escalatory coverage is significant. These findings are quite consistent with the earlier studies,³⁴ where the researchers found preponderance of conflict escalatory frames in Pakistan news media. Separately, the Taliban and the ethno-political conflicts are predominantly reported from war journalism perspective. The key indicators reveal that the Pakistan Army high-handedly controls electronic news media, when it comes to reporting on the activities of Taliban. The media simply relies on the press releases issued by the information wing of the military and perspective of the common people is ignored.³⁵ Similarly, on the ethnic conflict in Karachi, MQM strictly controls the media and constructive investigation into the conflict is denied. While the viewpoint of MQM is enthusiastically highlighted, perspectives of other stakeholders like the PPP, ANP and other nationalist parties are ignored in the two TV channels.

However, for Balochistan and sectarian conflicts, peace journalism is the dominant mode. Both *Geo and Dunya* TV channels focused on the causes and contexts of the two disputes, the plight of the victims and explored avenues for peaceful resolution of them. These findings are quite consistent with the previous investigations by researchers into these

³⁴ Hussain, 2017.

³⁵ Shabbir Hussain, "Conflict Journalism in Pakistan: Quest for more Constructive Reporting," *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2 (23) (2015): 82-104.

two conflicts who found that the Pakistani media applied de-escalatory strategies.³⁶

Second Research Question

What are the key thematic frames that characterise the reporting of these four conflicts in *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV*?

Table No.3

Thematic Emphasis in Conflict Reporting

Conflicts	Escalation	N (%)	De-Escalation	N (%)
Taliban	Securitisation*	199(42)	Humanisation	50(11)
	Incompatibility Otherness	77(16) 113(24)	Compatibility We'ness	37(8) 12(3)
	*Chi Square; 24.54 P Value .000			
Balochistan	Sensationalism	50(11)	Responsible	62(13)
	Securitisation	70(15)	Humanisation	103(23)
	Otherness	49(11)	We'ness*	131(28)
*Chi Square 52.74 P Value.000				
Sectarian	Incompatibility	30(12)	Compatible	29(12)
	Sensationalism	22(9)	Responsible*	94(37)
	Securitisation	32(13)	Humanisation	46(18)
*Chi Square 34.08 P Value .031				
Ethnic	Politicisation*	110(44)	De-Politicisation	26(10)
	Sensationalism	34(14)	Responsible	19(8)
	Securitisation	36(15)	Humanisation	23(9)
*Chi Square 186.02 P Value.000				

As the above table reveals, Pakistan media treats the Taliban conflict mainly as a security problem (p value, .00). The Taliban fighters are denigrated as a terror group, who are against the territorial integrity and national security of Pakistan. While the scourge of terrorism has

³⁶ Shabbir Hussain and K. Lynch, "Media and conflicts in Pakistan: Towards a theory and practice of Peace Journalism," *Working Paper*, Sydney University, https://sydney.edu.au/arts/peace_conflict/publications/Peace%20Journalism,%20media%20and%20conflicts%20in%20Pakistan.pdf

impacted the society on many dimensions like the trauma and psychological problems that tribal people have endured; demolition of their houses and businesses and the nightmarish experiences while in camps — the media conveniently ignored all these and mainly discussed the events through the security lenses. A previous study by Shabbir Hussain into the media reporting of war on terror yielded the same results.³⁷

Similarly, as shown in the above table, the Balochistan conflict is mainly reported from We'ness perspective, where the media empathise and sympathise with the people for the problems they are facing, which are not of their making. The Pakistan media duly highlighted the activities of politicians and human right activists, who call for a more constructive engagement with the insurgents. Often the media criticised the government for being unfair to the Baloch people and not giving them their due. The two TV channels often referred to the Baloch people as patriotic Pakistanis and criticised the elites of the country for being unfair to them. These findings are quite consistent with another study, where the researchers found that Pakistani media was pro-people and conciliatory while reporting on events happening in Balochistan.

Likewise, as shown in the table no.2, the reporting of the sectarian conflict is mainly characterised by responsibility factor. Pakistani media is conscious of the sensitivity of this conflict and barely mentions the full details, as any misreporting can lead to a serious crisis in other parts of the country. While both the channels sympathised with the sufferers during sectarian skirmishes, they avoid wild predictions and prognosis, which is otherwise so common in Pakistan.³⁸

Finally, the two channels mainly covered the ethnic conflict in Karachi from political perspective. While the Karachi conflict is the second deadliest conflict in Pakistan, deaths of common people is simply reported as an unworthy issue, though political deaths get major coverage in the newscasts. The media maintains the binaries of worthy political victims and unworthy common victims. The conflict is told from a political perspective, where the political antagonists are reported as having conflicting interests, where no harmony is possible.

³⁷ Hussain, 2015.

³⁸ Hussain, "Critical Academic Junctures," 18.

Third Research Question

What are the similarities and differences among the key discursive strategies that *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV* apply to report the four conflicts?

Table No.4

Key Thematic Analysis of Geo and Dunya TV

Conflicts	News Channels	Key thematic emphasis in media reporting N(%)							
		Escalatory themes				De-escalatory themes			
Ethnic Conflict		<u>Politicisation</u> Incompatibility	Sensationalism	Securitisation	Otherness	<u>De-politicisation</u> Compatibility	Responsibility	Humanisation	We'ness
	Geo	54(41.2)	17(13.0)	23(17.6)		23(17.6)	6(4.6)	15(11.	
	Dunya	56(47.9)	17(14.5)	13(11.1)		13(11.1)	13(11)	8(6.8)	
Sectarian Conflict	Geo		9(7.4)	17(14)	13(11)		48(39.7)	22(18.	12(9.9)
	Dunya		13(9.8)	15(11)	17(12)		46(34.8)	24(18.	17(13)
Taliban conflict	Geo	43(16.6)		101(39.	51(19.7)	23(8.9)		36(13.	5(1.9)
	Dunya	34(13.7)		98(42.7)	62(25.0)	14(10.1)		14(5.6)	7(2.8)
Balochistan Conflict	Geo		24(10.7)	33(14.7)	22 (10)		30(13.4)	43	72(32)
	Dunya		26(10.8)	37(15)	27 (12)		32(13.3)	60	59 (25)

As shown in the above table, both *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV* emphasised the same themes with almost the same frequencies while reporting on the four conflicts. For example, in the case of ethno-political tension in Karachi, the two channels mainly reported the situation through political perspective, with other important perspectives relatively getting lesser focus.

Similarly, in case of the sectarian conflict, the table shows that the media responsibility factor is dominant in the coverage of these two channels. The media reports avoid mentioning the rival sects, the groups involved and their other activities like who are the funders and employers. Media usually exercises restraint, when it fears that irresponsible reporting would further inflame the situation. Likewise, as the above table reveals, in case of Taliban and Balochistan conflicts, both the TV channels apply the same strategies with almost the same frequencies to report on events. These findings are quite in line with a major study conducted by Shabir Hussain in which different TV channels and newspapers were analysed on the reporting of five conflicts in Pakistan.³⁹ The researcher found that the media applied same strategies to report on conflicts despite differences in terms of ownership, editorial policies and target audiences.

Conclusion

This study investigated the coverage of the four different conflicts in the two leading TV channels of Pakistan to determine whether the reporting is of escalatory or de-escalatory nature. For this purpose, content analyses of one year each for the four conflicts were conducted. As far as first research question is concerned, the finding of this study revealed that the two TV channels predominantly adopted the conflict-escalatory approach while covering these conflicts.) These findings are not surprising as the existing literature is replete with the instances, where traditional media mainly focuses on conflict escalation. In fact, many scholars of conflict journalism believe that a combination of the factors including state interests, professional dictates and economic motives of media industries drive them towards war journalism. Summarising this

³⁹ Hussain, 2017.

discussion of the media's penchant for conflicts,⁴⁰ Wolsfeld says that war stories are good news stories while peace stories hardly qualify to be news stories for the modern-day commercial media.

However, some researchers have found conflict de-escalatory trends in media reporting of conflicts especially in the Asian settings.⁴¹ In this study, it has been found out of the four conflicts, the two conflicts, sectarian conflict and Balochistan conflict, were reported in a conflict de-escalatory mode. Previously, researchers found that the two conflicts are reported in peace journalism fashion. According to the critical pragmatic model of peace journalism,⁴² a conflict is more likely to be reported in de-escalatory terms if there is elite dissensus and the journalistic assessments tilt towards peaceful resolution of conflicts to secure national harmony. In case of Balochistan conflict, journalists in Pakistan believe that war is no solution to this conflict and usually promote peace journalism. Similarly, in case of the sectarian conflict, the two TV channels exercised maximum restraint to remain responsible, as any misreporting can be dangerous for the already volatile situation in the country.

The literature on framing scholarship suggests that media usually adopts a particular perspective to report on a certain phenomenon. With regards to the second research question, the two TV channels framed the four conflicts through different thematic strategies. While the Taliban conflict is mainly reported from a security perspective, other important topics like problems of refugees, damages to businesses and infrastructures and deaths in collateral damages were usually ignored. Similarly, the situation in Balochistan was reported from 'We'ness' perspective where the problems of common people were highlighted. The ethnic conflict in Karachi was mainly told from political perspective where the real conflict on the ground was ignored and only statements and counter statements by belligerent politicians were reported.

⁴⁰ G. Wolsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press 1997).

⁴¹ J. Lynch and J. Galtung, "Reporting Conflict: New Directions in Peace Journalism (UQP); S. T. Lee, and C. C Maslog, "War or Peace Journalism? Asian Newspaper Coverage of Regional Conflicts," *Journal of Communication* 55 (2005, June): 311-329.

⁴² Hussain & Lynch, 2016.

Although the deaths of common civilians were ignored, political deaths were considered worthy victims and hence consume major chunk of airtime on the two TV channels. Finally, the Pakistani media adopts a very responsible approach towards the reporting of sectarian conflict. Many issues that may be newsworthy but could lead to conflict escalation are ignored. The journalists feel responsibility for their reporting and avoid sensational reporting, which might jeopardize sectarian harmony in the country. This is in line with the observations of German conflict journalism scholar Thomas Hanitzsch⁴³ that media in Asia and Islamic settings have more chances to practice peace journalism than in the Western contexts. Regarding the final research question, this study found out that the two leading TV channels *Geo TV* and *Dunya TV* were quite similar in their approach towards covering these four conflicts. They saw these conflicts through the same lens and the reporting style didn't vary to a greater length.

In conclusion, this study found preponderance of conflict escalatory themes in Pakistan's TV channels, which are mainly propelled by a lopsided assessment of national interests (in case of the Taliban conflict), pressure from powerful groups (the army in relation to Balochistan and the MQM in relation to the ethnic conflict) and popular sensitivity (in the case of the sectarian conflict). Any corrective strategy would be the role reversals in Taliban and ethnic conflicts. The study suggests that more qualitative work needs to be done to understand the complex interplay of media and politics in the reporting of these conflicts. In this connection, the critical pragmatic model of peace journalism⁴⁴ would be a good starting point.

⁴³T. Hanitzsch, "Journalists as Peacekeeping Force? Peace Journalism and Mass Communication Theory," *Journalism Studies* 5(4) (2004): 483-495.

⁴⁴ Hanitzsch, 2016.