

Media ethics and students' perceptions: A study of the use of freedom of expression by anchor persons in the light of individualism

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Abstract

This research aims at integrating the concept of individualism with the electronic media to explain the condition of media ethics with reference to the freedom of expression; which is the expression of the individual autonomy. It is hypothesized that the freedom of expression is not the license of media ethics violation. Students' perceptions about the exercise of freedom of expression by anchorpersons in political talk shows are examined in the perspective of media ethics violations. Survey method is applied and forty respondents are selected through the convenience sampling technique. The sample consists of both male and female respondents to determine if any relationship exists between anchorpersons' freedom of expression and the underlying situation of media ethics in talk shows. The overwhelming majority of respondents suggested that the anchorpersons are misusing the freedom of expression and hence violate the media ethics.

Key words: *Individualism, Freedom of expression, Anchorpersons, Political talk shows, Media ethics*

Introduction

Through the annals of history, from the age of antiquity of Greece, Medieval age, Renaissance, Protestant Reformation and Cartesian thinking, age of enlightenment, the modern age and finally the postmodern era, the concept of individualism has been customized in accordance with the inherent specifications of that particular era.

"Individualism is a moral, political or social outlook that

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stresses human independence and the importance of individual self-reliance and liberty. It opposes most external interference with an individual's choices, whether by society, the state or any other group or institution, and it also opposed the view that tradition, religion or any other form of external moral standard should be used to limit an individual's choice of actions" (Individualism - By Branch / Doctrine - The Basics of Philosophy, n.d.).

Individualism basically is an ethic by doctrine of philosophy. It renders the free will of humans and sets them free from every outer pressure and limitations. Each individual has complete authority to make decisions and perceive things in accordance and consent of their own belief and state of mind.

"The important distinction between the two concepts "individualism" and "individuality" can be visualized from a technical viewpoint; the former is often depicted as social and ethical phenomena of human relations and conduct, while the latter is often depicted as a psychological phenomenon of mental growth." (Individualism; | Philosophy, n.d.)

The concept of individualism in the light of philosophy can best be enthralled by explaining the related concepts of individualism:

Ethical Individualism: It argues that individual conscience or reason is the only moral rule, and there is no objective authority or standard which is bound to take into account (Individualism - By Branch / Doctrine - The Basics of Philosophy, n.d.).

Political Individualism: It maintains that the state should take a merely defensive role by protecting the liberty of each individual to act as he or she wishes, just as long as he or she does not infringe on the same liberty of another (essentially the laissez-faire position at the heart

of classical liberalism, libertarianism and modern capitalism) (Individualism - By Branch / Doctrine - The Basics of Philosophy, n.d.). The other ethical positions which foster the concept of individualism are the Scottish School of common sense, hedonism, eudemonism, egoists and existentialism.

In the present age the individual autonomy is important and has central role in decision making and all other important phenomena of society and state. "Neither the subject-object nor fact-value nor material-spiritual split puts the Enlightenment into its sharpest focus, however. Its deepest root was a pervasive individual autonomy. What prevailed was the cult of human personality in all its freedom" (Christians, Ferré, & Fackler, 1993; p. 21).

The concept of individuality in the realm of Pakistani electronic media is a debatable phenomenon, being entrenched within the system and has a key role in the process and applicability of media ethics and regulations. The mirror metaphors of the concept of individualism in media are the freedom of expression, freedom of communication, freedom of information and freedom of speech.

Television was introduced by Pakistan Television Corporation in 1964 and remained under state control. However in 2002, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance was finally promulgated on March 1, 2002. Adaptation of Pakistan Electronic Media from the state owned broadcasting to liberal, privately owned media, was a great triumph and it also played a significant role in diversifying vision of the individuals (Needs assessment on promoting ethics and transparency in Pakistani media, 2014, Pakistan Press Foundation).

The individual rights have always remained an important issue of concern for state as well as for media throughout the world and in Pakistan as well.

"Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 provides that every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of press subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law"(Media Ethics and Regulations in Pakistan | Blue Chip Magazine, n.d.). However, after the 18th amendment of the Constitution, fundamental right to information Article 19A was introduced which states that every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance (Media Ethics and Regulations in Pakistan; Blue Chip Magazine," n.d.).

In the current scenario, media is free and liberal and the media personnel are working unrestrictedly in the light of the legal right guaranteed to them, the freedom of expression.

Assumptions:

1. To understand the working of any whole or collective body it's important to recognize the role of individuals.
2. Individuality admirably accepts the diversified and pluralistic aspects of society and media as it celebrates the differences and opposed collectivism.
3. The freedom of media practitioners is an expression of Individual autonomy. (Christians, Ferre & Fackler, 1993, p. 30).
4. Media ethics are not the rules or guidelines assembled for the media outlets; these are basically to guide the media individuals / practitioners as how they are supposed to work as ultimately they represent the whole media community.

5. The individualistic ethical development improves society by stressing self- improvement and individual decision making (Gordon, Kittross, Merrill, & Reuss, 1999, p. 5).
6. Individual differences, backgrounds, values and perceptions strongly influence the decisions the journalists make as they cover news (Gordon, Kittross, Merrill, & Reuss, 1999, pp. 40-41).
7. The collective decisions made by men and women who work for news and entertainment media flow from their individual values (Gordon, Kittross, Merrill, & Reuss, 1999, pp. 40-41).
8. Theories of quantitative research define the phenomena of society on the basis of causal relationship between the variables and the identified parts of any phenomenon; and in the light of that relation the whole is explained.

The researcher has deliberately integrated the conception of individualism to the media landscape. The individual autonomy in media is prevailed by the use of freedom of expression; hence the researcher has incorporated the idea of freedom of expression and its use by the anchorpersons in political talk shows in an effort to illuminate and investigate the observed media ethics violation by the exercise of the power of freedom of expression. It is a fact that media's role as a watchdog of society can only be achieved when it is free and democratic but the power of freedom of expression must not be used as an authority to violate the media ethics. The anchorpersons lead discussions in an authoritative way and have tendency to persuade the audience. The way they express their thought and perception to the audience in the name of freedom of expression is a big question for the authenticity and code of media ethics.

The study aims to analyze the students' perception regarding the use of freedom of expression by anchorpersons and their authenticity compromised in political talk shows. The study also evaluates the condition of media ethics in political talk shows in the light of freedom of expression exercised by anchorpersons.

Literature Review

Freedom of expression is the application of individual autonomy as far as mass media is concerned. It enables the journalists and media professionals to work for the welfare of society, in fact it is a tool through which media can work effectively to eradicate the social evils of society but it is not the license for the violation of media ethics indeed.

Media ethics are not the laws and set rules like in the other professions of science and theology. They are formulated by a continuous process to guide media practitioners for establishing a responsible media system. Media ethics is a field which deals with the issues and courses of action in the endless array of grey areas where things are not final and clear. One cannot in fact find the answers exactly. "Media ethics concern right and wrong, good and bad, better and worse actions taken by people working for media. Media themselves, of course, cannot be ethical or unethical- Only their staff members can. "When we deal with media ethics, we are really concerned with ethical standards of media and what kinds of actions they take" (Gordon, Kittross, Merrill, & Reuss, 1999, p. 1).

Hence media ethics are not the rules and regulations designed for media organization. These are basically the rules and guidelines formulated for media practitioners, devised to enable them to work

properly under the umbrella of these ethics and enjoy the freedom of expression and communication within the limitations of certain values and finally their efforts must be for the good of individuals and society as a whole.

Gordon, Kittross, Merrill & Reuss (1999) defined three broader classes of theories that deal with the ethical issues; 'Deontological Ethical Theory', 'Teleological Ethical Theory' and 'Personalist or Subjective Theory'. First supposes that a journalist has to follow some principles like attributing the source in a news story. The second one deals with the process in which a journalist tries to gauge or assess the consequences of his or her decision in practicing a particular action and its alternatives and consequences as well. And third one is related to intuition, emotions, spirituality and several other moral features.

"A journalist is not simply writing for the consumption of others. He or she is writing as self-expression and self-gratification, and the self is developed by the very act of expression. The processes of deciding to do a story, selecting what will be used, and expressing this material is all impinged on ethics and affect the moral character of the media person. What all media people communicate is, in a very real sense, what they are. They work to influence the lives of the others and leave an impact on their beliefs through the tool of the true essence of their own lives. Through their actions, they existentially make their ethical selves" (Gordon, Kittross, Merrill, & Reuss, 1999, p. 1)

When the media practitioners come up with a certain piece of writing on media, they are not only inclined to deal with the responsibility of the whole society but they deal at the same time with their own selves as well. So, ethics are the phenomena which not only ensure the credible working of media but also identify the role of media professionals as well.

Freedom of expression is considered one of the basic human rights but it is also restricted in the form of defamation, libel etc. "Since the dawn of civilization-from the Hammurabi Code of ancient Babylon to the Torah, Holy Bible, and Koran to the philosophers of the Enlightenment to today-the concept of basic human rights has been developed and debated" (Good, 2003, p.161).

Good (2003) advocates further about the human rights and dignity as we are living in media rich societies: Media is working to grab the attention of people and for this purpose at times seems to be unconcerned about the quality of the programs being aired. Arthur (2003) has discussed the case study of professional Wrestling program, which is quite famous in America, the WWE. A report released by the Indiana University for the Television news program *Inside Edition*. The research team, headed by Dr. Walter Gantz and Raney A. Arthur served as a consultant, analyzed the content of 50 episodes of Raw that was aired between January 1998 and February 1999 and found the following obscenities in the 50 episodes of this wrestling program; nearly 1,000 times use of the word "hell" and about 500 times use of the word "ass"; more than 600 incidents in which a wrestler smashed the head of his or her opponent with a steel chair, stick, or garbage can or threw his or her opponent through a folding table; and more than 300 references to and depictions of sexual activity. The purpose of this research was to highlight the human dignity being ruined in such kinds of wrestling programs (Good, 2003, pp. 163-165).

The importance of basic human rights remains a debatable issue and media, with its ever expanding network and influence, is responsible to safeguard these basic human rights and ensure the empowerment of human dignity. The obscenity of media content and its undesirable

influence on society is a question for media practitioners.

Restatement of Torts, which is prepared by lawyers specializing in tort law and published by the American Law Institute, says: "A communication is defamatory if it tends to harm the reputation of another as to lower him in the estimation of the community or to deter third persons from associating or dealing with him" (Holsinger, 1986, p.87).

In the frame of media, the defamation law concerns to safeguard the individual's rights and reputation in a community. An individual is an important entity of a society which has his own rights and concerns. Media has freedom to talk about the issues of society and to question the arrangements and decisions of government if these are not in public favor or for utmost good.

But this freedom has certain limitations and defamation is one of them, which hinders media to project any stuff against a common person or publicly famed celebrity which can harm or injure one's reputation.

Holsinger (1986) states, "Under the common law a person defamed by any media outlet has the right to sue the person to whom he finds involved in this offensive act". Therefore, the accountability of media persons is important in this regard to ensure ethical and reliable production of content which quintessentially ensures the individual's fair reputation in a community. "A disclosure of private fact occurs when some medium of communication disseminates personal information that the individual involved did not want made public. The information must be of a nature that would be offensive to a person of ordinary sensibilities" (Holsinger, 1986, p. 171).

The law of privacy strives to guarantee one's privacy and the desirability to determine individual's rights. The thesis of individuality can never be underestimated or overlooked by any social phenomenon.

Feintuck & Varney (2006) identified the phenomenon of freedom of expression in the light of power of media. The modern media corporates are using the connotation of freedom of communication to further their own benefits and corporate's concerns.

The concept of freedom of communication facilitates public and media both with a right to actively participate in the process of communication and empower the right of individuals to freely participate and raise their voices on the platform of media. This is the way a media can perform the role of watchdog in a society. However, the problem lies with the present connotation of the thesis of 'freedom of expression' which is being mishandled and misused by corporate media and agencies who are striving for their own benefits rather than to work in the true essence of freedom of expression.

Feintuck & Varney (2006) further explain the power of media as "the central purpose of commercial media is not to deliver products to audiences but to deliver the audience, as a product, to advertisers". The corporate culture of media is basically working for corporate benefits. It is the negative aspect or usage of media power which seems to undermine the basic rights of individuals for commercial benefits by taking society as a market of their products.

"The folklore of the press as watchdog is one clear application of atomism to the world of news reporting. Here the press considers itself staunchly independent: apart from government and unconstrained by business" (Christians, Ferre & Fackler, 1993, p. 70). Freedom of media has legitimized the power of media. This legitimized freedom and power phenomena have granted media the authority and independence to work as a watchdog of society.

The concepts of atomism and individuality advocate that media is free

from outer pressure and is supposed to work as an independent autonomy in society. "Freedom of expression, in particular, came to be seen as a natural right essential to the preservation of individual autonomy. According to libertarianism, freedom of the press is a personal and universal prerogative to publish one's own view freely, a natural right belonging to anyone who cares or has the wherewithal to establish a newspaper, magazine, or broadcasting station" (Christians, Ferre & Fackler , 1993, p. 28).

Freedom of expression empowers the individual autonomy in the society and legitimizes the right to express the personal views openly. It is the sense of enlightenment which fills people with a reason to participate and communicate at the mass level and on the platform of media which is considered to be the fourth pillar of a state. According to Thomas Jefferson, "Where the press is free, all is safe"(Christians, Ferre & Fackler , 1993, p. 30).

The freedom debate is actually the debate of individual autonomy. The concept of individuality is strengthened in a society where laws like freedom of expression and communication exist.

The freedom of expression anticipates the celebration of individual rights and so in a democratic society media should be free and democratic as well.

With the onset of liberal, pluralistic media trend, where the individuals have right to express their views freely on media and issues are discussed with ultimate freedom and liberty; media becomes independent and out of influence of certain powers. Despite all this broad vision and horizon of media, there are some important issues being originated under the claim of freedom of expression and there are some technicalities of this very freedom. The current Pakistani media seems to be entangled with the notion of freedom of expression

and the media ethics.

Media is more like an industry now, which is dealing with the commodities and more inclined towards the corporate benefits rather than portraying true picture of any story. In the run of breaking news and battle for ratings, the news channels are working more for viewership instead of the credibility and accuracy of news content.

News is all about an individual who is the most important entity of a society. In the quest of viewership and sponsors, media outlets are working for the things and issues entitled as news, which would comparatively catch the human interest and grab their attention. In this regard the connotation of freedom of expression which ideally strengthens the human rights and fosters the concept of individuality is being misused by the media people.

The current trend of infotainment programs like 'Khabarnaak' and Hasb-e-Hal, the politicians are being presented in a humiliating way; the projection of their personalities in these programs is a big question about freedom and the ethical limitations of media.

The news channels are giving priority to news on the celebrities' personal life and private concerns. By doing this, media not only spoils the true essence of media freedom but also intrudes illegally to one's personal life and matters. In a democratic society an individual has a complete liberty to spend life according to his/her own choice. Media cannot question this freedom with the weapon of that very freedom granted to them in the name of freedom of expression.

Media corporations are using freedom of expression for their own hidden corporate agendas and have emerged as commercialized corporation where the viewership is more important than credibility and where individuals are suffering with the so called freedom of

expression. Media's freedom of expression is now a question for individuality. The concept of individualism proposes that each individual has his/her own identity and is a free entity of a society. The notion of individualism in terms of mass media deals with the power and authority of mass media in society. This study is an attempt to describe the use of freedom of expression by anchorpersons of political talk shows and how they are violating media ethics.

Hypotheses and Research Questions:

H₁: The students of Punjab University perceive that the use of freedom of expression by anchorpersons in political talk shows leads towards the violation of media ethics.

H₂: The students of Punjab University perceive that the use of freedom of expression by anchorpersons in political talk shows is not associated with the violation of media ethics.

RQ1.Do the anchorpersons of political talk shows violate media ethics in the name of freedom of expression?

RQ2.Do the anchorpersons in political talk shows disregard the guests in panel?

RQ3.Do the anchorpersons dictate audience by advocating their own stance?

RQ4.Do the anchorpersons use freedom of expression to influence and attain public favors?

RQ5.Do the anchorpersons manipulate the sensitive issues in political talk shows?

Methodology

Survey method is used to investigate the perception of students of the University of Punjab about the use of freedom of expression by anchorpersons in political talk shows through online survey.

Convenient sampling is applied as researcher found it more economical and time saving.

Results

Table 1: Misuse of the power of freedom of expression by anchorpersons.

| | | |
|-------------------|----|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 18 | 45% |
| Agree | 21 | 52.5% |
| Neutral | 1 | 2.5% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 2: Anchorpersons give biased views towards the political parties.

| | | |
|-------------------|----|-------|
| | 15 | 37.5% |
| Strongly Agree | | |
| Agree | 21 | 52.5% |
| Neutral | 4 | 10% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 3: The anchorpersons impose their own opinion and thought in political talk shows.

| | | |
|-------------------|----|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 7 | 17.5% |
| Agree | 23 | 57.5% |
| Neutral | 8 | 20% |
| Disagree | 2 | 5% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 4: Anchorpersons use tactics to create impressions of promoting national interest.

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 11 | 27.5% |
| Agree | 25 | 62.5% |
| Neutral | 2 | 5% |
| Disagree | 2 | 5% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 5: Anchorpersons compromise authenticity in a struggle to increase ratings.

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 15 | 37.5% |
| Agree | 17 | 42.5% |
| Neutral | 5 | 12.5% |
| Disagree | 3 | 7.5% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 6: Anchorpersons at times get personal with the guests in panel.

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 16 | 40% |
| Agree | 17 | 42.5% |
| Neutral | 5 | 12.5% |
| Disagree | 2 | 5% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 7: Anchorpersons use derogatory language for political leaders.

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 8 | 20% |
| Agree | 25 | 62.5% |
| Neutral | 4 | 10% |
| Disagree | 3 | 7.5% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 8: Projection of political leaders by the anchorpersons is quiet humiliating.

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 11 | 27.5% |
| Agree | 20 | 50% |
| Neutral | 9 | 22.5% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 9: Anchorpersons exaggerate the political issues in political talk shows.

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 13 | 32.5% |
| Agree | 25 | 62.5% |
| Neutral | 2 | 5% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Table 10: Anchorpersons at times defame political leaders without any empirical evidence.

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 11 | 27.5% |
| Agree | 22 | 55% |
| Neutral | 6 | 15% |
| Disagree | 1 | 2.5% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

Findings and Analysis

The study reveals that the freedom of expression facilitates anchorpersons with the power and freedom to speak and share opinion

on the platform of media, the large majority (94%) of respondents agreed with this fact. The (97.5%) respondents perceived that the anchorpersons misuse the power of freedom of expression in their talk shows. The handsome majority (90%) agreed with the fact that anchorpersons give biased interpretations about the political parties in their talk shows.

The study elucidates that majority (75%) of respondents believed that the anchorpersons impose their own views on audience under the phenomenon of freedom of expression. While the large number of people (90%) are of the opinion that the anchorpersons tactfully give audience an image that they are promoting the national stance. The study further explores the fact about the credibility of the political talk shows, hence, the (80%) majority of people agreed with the view that the anchorpersons compromise the credibility of the talk shows to maximize the ratings of their shows.

It is also observed that the anchorpersons get personal and intrude in the personal lives of political leaders while anchoring the shows as large number of people (82.5%) observed the same fact. The findings of the study further illustrate that (82.5%) respondents have opinion that the anchorpersons use derogatory language for political leaders.

Henceforth, the (77.5%) respondents have view point that the

anchorpersons humiliate the political leaders in their talk shows. The results of the study further suggest that the majority (95%) of the respondents have a stance that the anchorpersons in political talk shows manipulate the sensitive issues in their talk shows. Moreover, the 82.5% population from the respondents believed that the anchorpersons defame the political leaders without any empirical evidence or proof.

The results explicate the fact that the freedom of expression, which is an expression for individual autonomy and grants media personnel power and authority, is being misused by anchorpersons in political talk shows. The anchorpersons who are gaining influence in the emerging phenomenon of contemporary mass media are violating the ethics of media in the name of freedom of expression.

The research questions determined the questionnaire. The information and data collected through the questionnaire supported the study. The results and findings supported the claim of the study and hence it is concluded that the majority of respondents perceive that the anchorpersons violate the media ethics in the name of freedom of expression.

The study is conducted in the light of the concept "Individualism". Freedom of expression is the ultimate power and

expression of individual autonomy. The anchorpersons are the emerging phenomenon in contemporary media. The findings and results concluded that the exercise of freedom of expression by anchorpersons leads towards the violation of media ethics.

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