

## Media ethics: A study of prime time news bulletins of leading Pakistani news channels

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### Abstract

This study examines the violation of media ethics through prime time news bulletins in leading Pakistani news channels. The objective of this study is to examine the role of prime time news bulletins in which they promote sensationalism in society, influence the people and set their perception on certain issues and to discuss whether they follow media ethics or not. The social responsibility theory is used, the methodology is a survey method and a questionnaire is used as a tool for data collection. The sample drawn for the study is a 100 which comprises of youth. The results of the study suggest that most of the people agree that news bulletins over-emphasize specific issues to create hype and promote sensationalism in society. Moreover the study justifies that prime time news bulletins of Pakistani channels promote sensationalism that leads towards the violation of media ethics.

*Key Words: News Channels, Subjective News Stories, Prime Time News Bulletin, Media Ethics*

### Introduction

Media has a great influence on our daily life. It has become the only medium which provides information and awareness. People are spending most of their leisure time watching television and communicating via social media. The influence of media seems very powerful on the masses both at a personal level and on society as a whole. Mass media has influenced our communicating behavior and our perception of key issues. Media is considered as the “forth pillar of the state” alongside the parliament, executive and

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judiciary. This status gives a new dimension to the importance of media organizations.

Countless channels are available and people can find every type of channel ranging from news to entertainment, cooking to religion and fashion to music. News channels are considered a large industry, which create a new society with free flowing information. News media is becoming a major tool for getting stories and information broadcasted around the world. The media personnel; reporters, editors, photographers, camera men, anchor persons and producers play a major role in setting the tone and outlook of news stories which ultimately influence the public towards major issues and set their perceptions. The media plays a role in shaping public opinion and setting perceptions about issues and current affairs. Government officials, politicians, corporate organizations and other powerful groups collectively play a major role in influencing the media, encouraging the journalists to manipulate content according to their own interest. Therefore, media organizations are part of a dominating group propaganda and have become potentially harmful for the general public. Symbolism and emotion is added to the reporting of events, to increase the influence on people that the media has.

The public's expectation from the media organizations and journalists was that they follow an ethical code and make sure the accuracy, fairness, independence and neutrality of reporting is maintained responsibly. Accuracy in the respect of the truth, independent of any political or foreign influences, coupled with fairness and neutrality by telling all the aspect of the story without

unnecessary hype and sensitization.

The media boom and the competition between media organizations are creating ethical problems in society as well as leading towards the violation of media ethics. Media rating is greatly compromising the standard of reporting. Channels run to public information without checking facts, presents rumor and hateful and incomplete information. People become confused to find out what is true and what is untrue. They became bad news as leading news story and promote hype or create sensationalism in society. Their content selections have more violence stories as compared to other essential issues.

In Pakistani society, electronics news revolutionary boom come in media since 2000 and., media ethics are moral dilemma and media freedom is becoming a challenge. Everybody examine media ethics from in their own context and understanding. When we talk about the media ethics, it means; it is about how a journalist report a story, what should journalist and media organizations to do to disseminate the information publically. But in the umbrella of ethics many questions rise like what should be the language, tone and context, how it presented, how to maintain the standard and many other elements. News organizations and journalists should maintain their accountability and provide the both side of the story to public which help them to analyze the all aspect of the event. To build public interest, media must create structures that will provide self-regulation that is credible not just with the audience, but also within the media industry itself. Media organizations should learn that sensationalism, malicious lies and unethical reporting might give

short term competitive advantages but it will not build respect and trust. The only approach for media organizations and journalists to fighting with these threats is to reinforce the media ethics and code of conduct. A media person feels his responsibility and ensures it in what context he reports the story. Hence current research or study aims is to examine the role of prime time news bulletin of leading Pakistani news channels.

**Objectives**

1. To examine the role of prime time news bulletin in which they promote the sensationalism in society
2. To examine the role of prime time news bulletin in which they influence the people and set their perception on certain issues
3. To examine the role of prime time news bulletin is they follow the media ethics

**Statement of the Problem**

News Channels considered as the prime source to get information and they play major role to make the perception of public on political or social issues. In Pakistan, since 2000 a revolutionary boom is come in our news and entertainment industry. Many private news channels are working day and night to disseminate the information firstly and accurately. But unfortunately they are

doing business every news channel has its affiliation with some powerful group and gave most of the time to that political group in their news bulletins and ignoring the social and effective issues like water or energy crises, situation of *Thar* people's in Pakistan are very hot issues of the entire era but none of news channel report a single package on that issue in their prime time news bulletin. The way they presented news, languages, and tone and background music of the prime time news bulletin is sometime very horrible especially when crime or political news is broadcasted. Even news channels follow up the trend of broadcasting indecent Indian songs as the background music in various news stories. In short, news channels are presenting the bad taste of news in prime time news bulletin and violating the media ethics.

This study is going to be conducted under the title of “media ethics: a study of prime time news bulletin of the leading Pakistani news channels” and has been find out up to what extent news channels create hype, promote sensationalism and make sense of people about issues and violating the media ethics.

### **Research Questions**

1. Does the prime time news bulletin of Pakistani news channels promote sensationalism?

2. Does the prime time news bulletin of Pakistani news channels violate media ethics?

### **Hypothesis**

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Prime time news bulletins of Pakistani channels promote sensationalism that leads towards the violation of media ethics.

### **Literature Review**

Literature review is considered to be the most important part of the research process as it allows learning from the previous researches. Therefore, the researcher reviewed all the relevant literature available on the internet or in the library from different books, newspapers, articles and previous researches. A logical and systematic literature review made this study comprehensive. Researcher added following studies as a literature review to support the own research study.

### **News Media and Ethical Concerns**

Media ethics is basically the standard for journalism. Media ethics are those principles of ethics or code of conducts and the practices as followed by the professional journalists to cope up with the challenges. These ethics or codes of conducts are designed by both

the media organizations and the professional journalists (Saxena, 2012).

Media ethics provide the guideline and guideline but unfortunately now media are subject to rating system and regulation by dominant groups. Media responsibility means present the true and objective news story. Kumar (2012) examine that responsible media is as the slogan that refers to the general belief that mass media has to be responsible in the public interest. Information technology is also creating new threats and ethical problems for the media houses. It digitally changes the background of the various news stories. Audiences have been able to rely on the facts what they are seeing actually there.

Gordon and Kittross (1999) said that ethical concern for media is important because it is answerable to the masses. They supposed that a reporter should ethically subjective, the news story which he report is the reflection of his feelings. No objectivity exists in media, it is the myth; even our own opinion have feelings and interest. Cohen-Almagor (2001) outlined the boundaries of freedom of speech and freedom of press in the context of media ethics. He elaborate that the concept of media ethics is conceived to be an oxymoron. Modern media are exposed as of violating ethical

concerns. Competition, rating and revenue generation are now consider more important and became ethics as a secondary element.

News media is basically the news industry that disseminated the important stories among people. News talk shows are helpful in changing the political structure, political system and political development. They play significant role to aware and influence the public to participate in society (Ahmed, 2010). Both print and electronic news media are restructuring the society structure and making the people's perception. Abt (1996) stated that in the contemporary society news media create distinction in society. It manipulated the things and changed the people's preferences. Basically, it offered the world of blurred boundaries where people are running to fulfill their false desires.

News is the one person's idea shared by all the members of the society. A journalist should be sensitive while reporting a news story. A journalist is one who seeks truth and reports it. Good (2003) states that journalist should be fair and have courage to report bold facts and interpret information objectively. It should search for facts and truth. Journalists can maintain the accuracy by providing the sources in stories so public can easily review the reliability and neutrality and discriminate the story with others.

Journalism ethics becomes unethical when manipulation of news stories and reality become distorted. He/ she should be considered the good taste or bad taste of news while reporting an event. Ingram, Henshall, and Browne (2008) differentiated between the bad or good taste of news. According to them bad taste of news media may mean that news content hurting or distressing the audience. A good taste of news means that news media avoid the stereotyping, unnecessary content and obey the standard accepted by the society and report the event accurately.

Happer and Philo (2013) examine the impact of media in construction of public beliefs, attitude and drawing a change in society. News media play a central role in informing the public about what happens in the world, particularly in those areas in which people have no access to the affected area or person and don't experience it lively.

Perebinosoff (2008) describe that ethical concerns have been around for a long time. News media is considering the only mark to get information instantly. It has advantage to break important news stories and keep people updated. The way, they presented breaking news stories have aggressive tone, indecent background sound, and not seem original. Journalism and news media is now become

business. If media is failed to generate revenue then advertisers are not happy. So in that scenario media ethics and code of conduct are neglected by the media organizations or professional journalists to make advertisers happy.

Mass media is not to just update or inform the people about latest happening but instead of it has to work as a watch dog for national as well as international interests and formulate the public opinion on different happenings. It engages the public into an ongoing dialogue with society, state and media. According to McQuail (2003) media under all circumstances are responsible and accountable to answer the question asking by the audiences. In today's society, news media is becoming the most powerful institute to hold the public opinion. Its key role is to provide the information and aware the people what is happening around them. People make their opinion after watching or reading the news content. Media changed the way of life and thinking style. Glasser (1999) states that press should play role to guide the public and improve their life. With the development public journalism is now being introduced in society. In the name of free expression of media, public journalism has political and power elite influence. They used it to disseminate their desires and agendas. Public Journalism used as a tool to

transfer filtered information by the elite and bringing people to discuss only those issues which concern them

News media seems as the hegemony of the powerful elite. They used the media as the agent to enforce the public interest and pull down the objectivity of media and impose their own ideology. Crook (2009) stated that press is becoming gradually more powerful and violent. Media become center and consider important among society; so government institutions and dominance groups using media and define the public interest according to their own purposes.

Journalists and media together should build harmony and unity to protect journalism. News organizations or journalists often claim that their own biases, interests and the pressure of powerful groups or advertisers do not affect their objectivity. They try their best to present the both side of news. Entman (1989) criticize the American journalistic and political process and described journalistic objectivity in a two way; first is depersonalization and second one is balance. Depersonalization means that a journalist should not express his own views, beliefs and feelings in the story or not even give any judgment about event. While a balance means that a journalist should cover all the aspect of story and give

importance to both side views without favoring one side.

People spent most of their leisure time in watching or reading media content and are gratifying their needs. Media houses and journalist should understand that people are watching, following or idealize them. Christian and Traber (1997) argue that mass communication field identifies the broader ethical approaches which make the world of mass media to make public news stories and responsible code of conduct. Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) focus on the norm of balance reporting and shows that elite press's loyalty to balance reporting actually leads him towards the biased coverage.

Although the reviewed literature highlights the different aspects related with the prime time news bulletin and news media ethics of Pakistani News channels. Objectivity in news is nothing and has no relationship with truth. With the advancement in technology and the digitalization of media made outdated the media laws and ethics and their regulation. Today, media organizations created reality of their interests and make the perception of public and influence them. Mass media are now becoming most powerful institute to hold and make it responsible and accountable.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As a theoretical framework of this study, researcher selected the social responsibility theory. Social responsibility theory is the concept of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century which replaces the libertarian theory. Social responsibility theory tells us how media/ press are supposed to operate. It is the theory of media ethics that guide the media organizations and practitioners they are obliged to work and perform their duties with responsibilities and to develop a standard in journalism and play role to make journalism better. The media should broadcast the news within the circle of ethical guidelines and in a responsible way. They are responsible to raise the voice of public and to disseminate the unbiased and objective news story. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) stated some aspects of the social responsibility theory which are following:

- Media must show truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance
- Media should be free but self-regulated within the framework of law designed by the institutions.
- Media is a forum for public to raise their voices.
- Media organizations or journalists are accountable to his audience

- Media should meet the standards and follow the ethics or code of conducts

Under the umbrella of social responsibility theory, the purpose of this research is to determine the role of prime time news bulletin in the formation of public opinion, spreading the sensationalism and violating the media ethics.

### **Research Methodology**

To address the research questions, survey method has been applied by the researcher to obtain the results or collect data that is quantitative in nature. Researcher selected questionnaire as a tool of data collection. Questionnaire is designed according to likert scale and based on close ended questions. Sample of the present study are young people who watched prime time news bulletin from age 18 to 30 from different universities of the Lahore, Pakistan on the basis of simple random sampling. The sample size for this study is 100.

### **Limitation of the Study**

It is very difficult for a researcher to conduct an ideal or perfect research. So, every study has some limitations. In the present study there are some limitations which are as following:

- One of the limitations of this study is that, only it is based on the survey method.
- In this study researcher have focused only on the private leading news channels, not consider the state own news channel in this study.
- In this study, researcher main focused is on violation of the media ethics.

### **Findings & Interpretation**

This section of study included descriptive analysis of respondent and tried to find out which channel people prefer to watch news bulletin and which segment they like most in news bulletin. Moreover, it also presented the results findings in form of percentage that are related to the new bulletin language, background music, news content and selection of news.

**Table 1****On which Pakistani news channel you watch news?**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Opinion</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Geo News	14	46.7%
ARY News	4	13.3%
Express News	2	6.7%
Dunya TV	8	26.7%
Samaa News	2	6.7%

**Table 2**  
**Which segment people like most in prime time news bulletin?**

Sr. No	Questions	Options with percentage				
		Strongly Disagree	Dis-agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Aggressive tone is used in the prime time news bulletins by the leading Pakistani news channels	0%	10%	6.7%	50%	33.3%
2	The leading Pakistani news channels undermine the professionalism while striving for rating in the prime time news bulletins	0%	0%	6.7%	56.7%	36.7 %
3	Language used by the leading Pakistani news channels in their prime time news bulletin is overstressed	0%	3.3%	16.7%	73.3%	6.7%
4	Leading Pakistani news channels at times create fear in the public through their presentation of news in the prime time news bulletins	0%	10%	3.3%	53.3%	33.3%
5	Hype is created by the leading Pakistani news	0%	0%	10%	40%	50%

	channels in their prime time news bulletins					
6	Leading Pakistani news channels gave more space to negative stories in the prime time news bulletins.	0%	13.3%	0%	53.3%	33.3%
7	Sensationalism is promoted by the leading Pakistani news channels in their prime time news bulletins	0%	3.3%	6.7%	63.3%	26.7%
8	Pakistani news channels over-exaggerate the specific issues in their prime time news bulletins	0%	3.3%	0%	70%	26.7%
9	Indecent songs and video clips are played in the prime time news bulletins by the leading news channels	3.3%	13.3%	13.3%	33.3%	36.7%
10	Prime time news bulletin neglecting the important issues of Pakistan and gave preference to player's wedding news and other local issues.	6.7%	13.3%	10%	30%	40%

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**Table 3**  
**Participant responses on the violation of media ethics in news**  
**bulletin**

Option	Opinion	Percentage
Political/ National	21	70%
International	2	6.7%
Sports	1	3.3%
Entertainment	3	10%
Weather	2	6.7%
Special package	1	3.3%

### **Analysis & Discussion**

This study examines the prime time news bulletin of leading Pakistani news channels in the context of media ethics. Total number of 100 respondents from the different universities of the Lahore was selected as the population and to fill the questionnaire. As illustrated through Table 1 points out that which of the following channel you watch most? When researcher enquired about the favorite news channel; it is observed that Geo News is the most popular news channel, 42% of the total people like to watch Geo news. Geo news is the most favorite and oldest media group in Pakistan. Dunya news enjoys 26.7% viewers. 13.3% of the selected population likes to watch ARY news. The lowest viewership is of

Express and Samaa news that is 6.7% among the selected population.

Table 2 points out that which segment of news bulletin people like most? According to collected data, 70% of the total respondents like political or national news in the prime time news bulletin which paly role to increase the political efficacy. 10% people like entertainment content, 6.7% people are interested in both international and weather forecasting news while rest 3.3% respondents liked sports and special package coverage by the news channel in their prime time news bulletin.

Table 3 comprises of many different statements which indicate that the prime time news bulletin pattern and their violation of media law or code of conducts. Statement 1 point out that leading Pakistani news channels use aggressive tone to present a news story. Results illustrated that 82% people are agreed, 10 % are disagree while rest of people show neutral judgment that news channels used aggressive tone to present a news story which is sanitized the viewers and unethical.

Statement2. Leading Pakistani news channels undermine the professionalism while striving for ratings in the prime time news bulletin. According to gathered data results indicate that 92% people are agreed and rests of 8% are showing neutral behavior that news channels are in the face of competition and are striving for rating and demoralized the professionalism.

Statement3. Language used by the leading Pakistani news channels in their prime time news bulletin is overstressed. Results indicate that 76% people are agreed, 4% respondents are disagree

that news channels used unethical language in their news bulletin. While gathered data shows that 20% respondents shows neutral behavior that language of news channel become aggressive day by day which stressed the people.

Statement4. Leading Pakistani news channels at times create fear in the public through their presentation of news in the prime time news bulletins indicate that 88% people are agreed from this statement, 8% respondents are disagree from that the prime time news bulletin create fear among people, while rest of people 4% show neutral behavior on the fear creation of the prime time news bulletins.

Statement5. Extra hype is created by the leading Pakistani news channels in their prime time news bulletin when researcher asked about the propagated and hyped nature of the prime time news bulletin analysis indicate that 88% people are agreed that news channels create hype and propagate the specific events while rest of respondent 12% shows neutral behavior nobody denied from this declaration.

Statement6. Leading Pakistani news channels give more space to the negative stories in the prime time news bulletin. When researcher asked about the news bulletin content that they broadcast negative stories, stories about rape, crime or terrorism from the respondent, results findings demonstrate that that 92% people are agreed from it and 8% respondents are disagree that news channels gave more coverage to the negative news stories.

Statement7. Sensationalism is promoted by the leading Pakistani news channels in their prime time news bulletin.

According to gathered data 88% respondents are agreed, 4% respondents are disagreeing that news channels promote sensationalism provoke the public interest and create bias in news stories.

Statement8. The leading Pakistani news channels over-exaggerate the specific issue in the prime time news bulletins. When researcher asked about it that news channels give importance or coverage to the specific events or issues in their news bulletins results indicate that 96% people are agreed from it and rest of 4% respondents are disagree that news channels gave coverage to the specific issues.

Statement9. Indecent songs and videos are played in the prime time news bulletins by the leading Pakistani news channels. According to collected data 62% people are agreed, 22% respondents are disagree, rest of 16% show neutral opinion about that the indecent Indian songs, movie clips, or dialogues are associated with the news content which is against the Pakistani media law and ethics.

Statement10. Prime time news bulletin neglecting the important issues of Pakistan and gave preference to player's wedding news and other local issues. When the researcher asked about that the news channels to get top rating are doing to neglect the national or important social issues and have focused on the celebrities personal life, results indicate that 78% people are agreed, 18% respondents are disagree that news bulletin lack the content and ignore the important issues to cover while rest of 4% respondents show neutral opinion.

### **Conclusion**

Media is become the center of our life. It influences behavior, attitude and makes perception of the viewers on different issues. People are depending on media to get latest update and keep themselves self- update. So, people are expected and demanding that the media organizations and journalists make sure the accuracy, fairness, neutrality and responsibility while reporting any event. This study is conducted on violation of media ethics by the prime time news bulletin. Researcher used social responsibility theory to support this study. Both the research questions do the prime time news bulletin of Pakistani news channels promote sensationalism? And does the prime time news bulletin of Pakistani news channels violate media ethics? For this study these questions have been proved under the quantitative approach and close ended questions were asked from the youth. Results indicate that majority of the respondents were agreed that prime time news bulletin is violating the media ethics. Government, politicians, corporate organizations and other powerful group collectively play role to influence the media, encourage the journalists to broadcast their interests and manipulate the content. In that context media organizations are become the part of dominate group's propaganda and become dangerous for audience. Competition between media organizations leads them towards the violating of media ethics. Media rating is surrendering the standard of media. Channels run to public information without checking facts. They became bad news as leading news story and promote hype or sensationalism in society. Their content selections have more violence stories as

compared to other essential issues. Presentation of news, language, tone and music is used and create indecencies and hype or promote sensationalism among society. They are neglecting the national, social and domestic issues and gave coverage to the specific issues of the elite class interest in their prime time. The coverage of player's wedding is more important for them as comparison to the considerable other important issues in Pakistan.

Only few respondents are of the result view that prime time news bulletin do not violate the media ethics and have objectivity.

### **Recommendations**

This section present some recommendations for future improvement in the prime time news bulletin of leading Pakistani news channels. Media organizations and journalists to fighting with ethical threats are to reinforce the media ethics and code of conduct. A media person should feel his responsibility and ensures it in what context he reports the story. News organizations and journalists should maintain their accountability and provide the both side of the story to public which help them to analyze the all aspect of the event.

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