

The Level of Autonomy of Journalists in Their Jobs: A Case Study of Rawalpindi and Islamabad Journalists

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ABSTRACT

Journalists play a tremendous role in shaping general public opinion. Despite the significant role of journalists in a society, very few studies in journalism and journalists have been conducted so far specially in the context of Pakistan. In fact, there is no credible scientific research available on journalists of Pakistan discussing the various roles they play. This study is conducted to examine the level of autonomy a Pakistani journalist enjoys at his/her respective beat and designation. The population of the study is the journalists working in Rawalpindi and Islamabad region. The study is exploratory in nature using quantitative survey method. Self-designed questionnaire is used to calculate the responses related to demographic details and job autonomy. All these queries are analyzed with data collection using convenient sampling technique. The data collected as a result of this study will benefit not only the journalists' community but would give key information to government and general public about this community. As a result of this study government could devise policies to benefit and to get benefit from the journalists. The general public would however get significant and interesting information about the people they consider as their spokesmen.

Keywords: Journalists, autonomy, journalism

INTRODUCTION

People expect news stories to be factual and something to be trusted. So while journalists enjoy this unlimited power of injecting their views and opinions to the public, it becomes the public right to question the journalists, who are the source of providing them information and helping them construct opinions on vital issues of their system. Their education level, salary, job satisfaction, political or religious affiliations etc. they all affect the type of story they present to the public.

Journalists play a tremendous role in shaping the public's agenda (McCombs, 1972). Despite the interest in journalism studies and journalism's role as the main source of information in modern societies, few empirical studies about the field of journalism have been conducted, particularly in Pakistan.

One of the most important aspects which is generally overlooked in Pakistan is journalists' job satisfaction. This dimension includes their likeness towards their job, their personal assessment towards working conditions, level of autonomy, relationship to their bosses and satisfaction with their salaries. In other words, tangible benefits such as salary, benefits and other perks combine with professional rewards like job autonomy and respect form job satisfaction (Pollard, 1995).

According to the instructional curriculum, devised for district correspondents by the Pakistan Press International and the Pakistan Press Foundation, a journalist must meet the criteria of

minimum education, maximum general knowledge, language proficiency, news sense, professional honesty, neutrality and diligence.¹

Defining a Journalist

Basically journalism doesn't have a concrete definition (aside from what the Dictionary says). Sometimes it requires people to put aside their own personal beliefs for the sake of fair reporting for the public. Sometimes it requires cutting certain parts of a story out keeping in view the interests of organization's policy.

It is a balance that every individual has to find. Finding said balance is a sensitive art which is why journalists have a crucial importance in society. They require ability to go out in public and spend extended periods of time talking to complete strangers as well as the ability to sit alone for hours and write and rewrite something to make it appealing and interesting to readers.

Journalism and Journalists in Different Regimes

The journalism history of Pakistan can be traced back to pre-independence when Muslim journalists worked with one aim against one enemy. Early Muslim journalists of the Subcontinent were driven by such high motives as reconstruction and welfare of society. Long before the partition of the Subcontinent, journalism had stood for public awareness, positive opinion making, and as a guardian of democratic principles and values. Their functions were to point out the problematic areas, thus bring about social improvement.²

Journalists like Molana Zafar Ali Khan, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Molana Muhammad Ali Johar, who worked during British regime had the real zeal and zest for this profession. They were the sole owners of their respective newspapers which made them autonomous enough in their profession that they could prove their work at highest credibility. For them journalism was not only the source of information or public opinion but a guide (Baloch & Dogar, 2008). That era was rightly called 'the personality based journalism' period.

Press freedom saw its toughest time when press and publication ordinance was introduced in 1970's (Niazi, 1986). Following era continued with same aggression and even worsened the situation for media and journalists as Niazi (2004) said

"May 13, 1978 was the blackest day in the history of journalism in the subcontinent, when four newsmen were ordered to be flogged by summary military courts."

In nutshell, media and journalists never remained free in true sense. Journalists in the subcontinent started their journey when the profession of journalism was taken as mission not as profession. From this 'personality based journalism' to 'structural based' where media is sub system of overall political system of the country (Nam, 1985), journalists have been through different systems which did not give them any freedom but more restrictions.

Problem Statement

This study aims at investigating that who the journalists are and how much autonomy they have in media organizations. The survey will explore the demographics like the educational level of journalists, their gender, income, marital status and about their area of accommodation etc. and autonomy the journalists are experiencing from Rawalpindi and Islamabad, as all these things directly or indirectly effect on the performance of journalists.

¹<http://www.pakistanpressfoundation.org/useraboutus.asp>, Retrieved on October 12,2009

²<http://www.syberwurx.com/jrc/Report/CONCEPT.html> Retrieved on December 20, 2009

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This survey aims at analysing the ground realities under which Pakistani journalists have to perform their professional duties. Following objectives have been devised for the proposed study:

1. To explore the typical journalists working in Rawalpindi and Islamabad region; that they are, and under what conditions do they work etc. including their basic demographic information.
2. To understand their level of autonomy in their respective organizations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is especially important because it considers an often overlooked class of journalist in Pakistan about whom little is known. The information about their academic background and professional skills would be helpful for the society to determine that whether these journalists are in a position to come up to the expectations of their job. By establishing baseline data on a few variables, the study enables future researchers to track these journalists' profile over time. Moreover, a common reader will have quite an interesting portrayal of the world of journalism and the journalists which affect their system and are considered to be their spokesmen.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do journalists feel free to discuss or write whatever they feel right?
2. Do they think they are playing any role in determining the strategic goals of their organization?
3. Do journalists have to follow any administrative instructions while planning/coverage of an event?

METHODOLOGY

Following methodology has been used to conduct this research.

Sampling Frame/Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of all the journalists working in international, national, local newspapers, electronic media and the wire agencies journalists working in Islamabad and Rawalpindi region. It was made sure that all type of media representative must participate in the study to make its findings more impactful and authentic.

Research Design

The study is exploratory in nature using quantitative research i.e. quantitative survey method. The decision to use this method was taken by keeping under consideration the need to explore this area on some measurable grounds. Quantitative survey method also makes it possible to include more people easily in research than in qualitative survey method. The proposed research is exploratory in nature as the researcher intends to collect, organize and summarize information about the research questions based on their demographic details and level of autonomy in their respective jobs. For this purpose a complete list of all these registered journalists is collected from Rawalpindi Press Club and Islamabad Press Club. A questionnaire asking questions ranging from their demographic details to the organizational, personal, social and professional life was formulated. Since Urdu journalism is more in use than any other language in Pakistan and most of the journalists understand only Urdu language. Simultaneously English journalism is also in vogue in Pakistan and there are

substantial numbers of journalists who are quite proficient in English. For the convenience of both categories, questionnaire was made in both Urdu and English languages.

Survey questionnaire is distributed among journalists using convenient sampling method in Rawalpindi and Islamabad Press Clubs. Online questionnaire is also developed to make this survey process more convenient for those journalists who use internet.

Sampling Method

A voluntary, non-probability (convenient) sampling method is used to carry out this research as the population of the study was distributed in four different media organizations i.e. Newspaper, Radio, Television Channel and News Agency. Though it was based on convenient sampling method, still it was ensured by the researcher that each organization's journalists get a chance to involve in the study so that the data can represent every type of media.

Instrument

The exploratory study on journalists was conducted through self-designed instrument. Closed ended questions developed specifically. Demographics of the sample were collected using age, gender, marital status, education level, income, area of accommodation, experience and job description of the respondents. Journalist's autonomy is evaluated using variables like operational autonomy, allocative autonomy and administrative autonomy. As the variables were continuous in nature, the five (5) point Likert scale was used in the study. The response range was: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree.

Conceptual & Operational Definitions

It is worthwhile to define some important terms operationally that have been used in this research frequently. It will give an insight that in what particular context questions are asked from journalists.

Autonomy

Journalists' freedom to organize their own activities and govern themselves. Autonomy was divided into three categories, namely; operational, allocative and administrative.

Operational autonomy is operationalized as journalists' freedom in their particular work and do they feel themselves free to write or discuss whatever they feel right. Allocative autonomy is conceptualized as to what extent journalists are given the share to of a total amount in the development of their organization. Do they think they are playing any role in determining the strategic goals of their organizations? While administrative autonomy is related to the arrangements and work which is needed to control the operation of a plan or organization. Whether they need to follow any administrative instructions while planning coverage of any event.

RESULTS

The data is collected from the journalists of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. A voluntary, non-probability (convenient) sample of 164 Journalists of Rawalpindi/Islamabad participated in the study. Following is the information of demographic details of journalists taken from the survey questionnaire.

Of the total 164 valid participants of the survey 132 were male respondents and 32 were female respondents. Therefore 80.5% of the responses recorded were from male participants, while 19.5% were from female participants.

The data collected of the age of the survey respondents demonstrates majority of the journalists surveyed fall under the age of 31-40 year group with 32%, second major age group was between 20-30 years old with 14%. 13% of the survey participants were in the 41-50 year age group, 12.2% in the 51-60 year age group and the most minimum number of journalists fall in the category of over 60 years age group.

The criterion of financial incentives ranges from the basic Rs 10,000 and lasts to Rs 61,000. The percentage of the subjects earning Rs 21 to Rs 30,000 and over Rs 61,000 are on same level with 18.3%. The lowest standing is of 2.4% related to the category of the earners who earn Rs 51,000 to Rs 60,000. The highest valid ratio is of the first category with the income of Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000.

Another vital category is of status that directly affects the working of any journalist. Married journalists are in considerable majority with the sum of 112 persons while out of 164 there were 52 single journalists.

The most applicable factor concerning the journalist community is education which elevates them among other professionals. Positively the greatest number of journalists is Masters with the peak average of 69.5%. Systematically journalists holding the degree of bachelors are on the second position with percentage of 20.7% and intermediate level is minimally low with the average of only 3.7%. The lowest category contains the matriculation degree with the ratio of 1.2%.

The most engraved and relevant qualification of Journalism/Mass communication carries the ratio of 58.5%. Disciplines of Social sciences and humanities and others range from the average of 15% to 9% with slight fluctuations. Whereas Natural sciences and Engineering subjects were at the lowest in number.

The highest number of journalists working in any media type was from print media (newspapers) with the percentage of 40.2%. Second was TV channels journalists with percentage of 32.9%. Other media types like news agencies, radio and magazine have the percentage as respectively 13.4%, 7.3% and 6.1% only.

Accommodation factor adds to the availability of journalists in the hour of need. Most of the journalists reside the capital of the country with the percentage of 42.7% and second journalist populated city is the twin city Rawalpindi with difference of just nearly 7%.

Less than half of the total journalists live in areas other than Rawalpindi and Islamabad. A huge number of 52.4% journalists go for reporting in comparison to the least practiced category of freelance reporting. Editing is the second most common job description of the journalists with the outcome of 23.2%. Two most common job statuses (permanent/contract base) are prominent with average of 50.0 and 31.75 respectively. The data portrays a positive picture as far as job security is concerned.

How many persons are dependent on journalists in their family was asked in the survey, and the frequency of the results suggests that almost 96% of total population have 5 dependents on them. More number of dependents must make it necessary to strive hard for earning, which can lead sometimes to stress and frustration.

The data reveals that majority of the journalists resides in the rented houses with less social security. The main lot concluded 57.3% out of 100% are the tenants. Journalists who are the sole owners of their houses have the average of only 25.6. Optimistically majority 37.8% spends 5 hours with their family which is the highest average.

Numerous numbers of journalists (34.1%) are having just the experience of just 1-5 years. Rest of categories of 6-10 year, 11-15 year, 16-20 year, 21-30 year and above have percentages

as 17.1%, 22%, 12.2% 13.4% respectively. There are working journalists with the above 30 years' experience but obviously they are least in number. There is a stark difference between the number of journalists who are pensioned: 20.7% and those who are deprived: 79.3%.

Table 1. Demographic Description

<i>Demographic Description</i>		<i>Demographic Description</i>	
Total Population	164	Social sciences	15%
Male Journalists	80%	Humanities	9%
Female Journalists	19%	Print Media	40%
Married	68%	TV channels	33%
Single	32%	News agency	13%
Live in Islamabad	43%	Radio	7%
Live in Rawalpindi	7%	Magazine	6%
31-40 years old	32%	Reporting	52%
20-30 years old	14%	Editing	23%
41-50 year old	13%	Permanent	50%
51-60 years old	12%	Contract	32%
10,000 to Rs 20,000 monthly income	33%	Tenants	57%
Rs 21,000 to Rs 30,000 and over Rs 61,000 monthly income	18%	Sole owners	26%
Rs51,000 to Rs60,000 monthly income	2%	1-5 years' experience	34%
Masters	69%	6-10year experience	17%
Bachelors	21%	11-15year experience	22%
Intermediate level	4%	16-20year experience	12%
Matriculation	1%	21-30year experience	13%
Journalism/Mass communication	58%	Pensioned	21%
Social sciences	15%	Non-pensioned	79%

How Far Journalists Feel Autonomous in their Profession?

As defined and explained earlier, the autonomy has been conceptualized and operationalized in three different sub-dimensions; namely, operational autonomy, allocative autonomy and administrative autonomy. The results for all these sub-dimensions are discussed separately in the following lines.

Operational Autonomy

It has been found that most of the respondents (over 50%) do not feel any problem or compulsion in writing or dispensing their professional responsibilities from their organization.

In a wake to explore the effects of demographic characteristics on operational, it has been found that male journalists seem to have been feeling more autonomous (54%) as compared to female journalists as only 31% of female journalists who feel free or don't feel under duress while writing or expressing their views in their respective areas of responsibility. On the contrary, majority of female journalists (about 50%) rejected the idea that there is any operational autonomy in their profession.

Age factor does seem to be influencing the views of journalists towards operational autonomy. Young journalists with the age range of 20-30 years old tend to feel themselves autonomous in writing or discussing their opinion more than journalists in any other age category. Journalists aging 41-50 feel relatively enjoying lesser degree of operational autonomy, and it goes down the line if we go higher in age. This state is clearly indicating that operational autonomy is inversely proportional to age factor, as increased sense of autonomy is seen in relatively lower age groups and found to reseed with age.

Same is the case with experience as journalists with the experience of 16-20 years seem to be the most dissatisfied people (60%) in terms of operational autonomy who do think themselves as free in operating in their own way without the interference of organizational instructions. However from 1-15 years' experience category, journalists agreed that they feel free in writing or discussing what they think is right. Although there are substantial number of people who disagreed still a considerable number of journalists remained neutral on this issue.

Allocative Autonomy

Our results of this level of autonomy reveal that 36% of the journalists do not feel to be playing any role in determining the strategic goals of their organization, almost the same proportion is seen those who feel autonomous in allocative terms.

A very prominent majority of low paid journalists agreed that they do not think they have a role on determining the strategic goal of their organization, on the contrary 100% highly paid journalists with the income range of Rs 51,000-60,000 disagreed and said they are playing role in the determining the strategic goals of their organization.

Different job descriptions like reporting, editing, management, photography and freelance reporting make journalists work different with other category and asks for distinct professional demands. Journalists working in management field feel autonomous (40%) as the management work itself explains its importance in any organization. Second most agreed category was reporting with 37%. Journalists in editing and freelance reporting had the opinion that they were not playing any role in determining the strategic goal of their organization. Surprisingly journalists related to photography opted to be neutral on this issue with 100% which shows that they do not feel themselves and their work contributing in any strategic goals of organization.

Administrative Autonomy

The level of administrative autonomy is found very low among journalists. 57% of the sample journalists feel that they receive instructions of administrative nature while planning for the coverage of any event, as they are not provided with vehicles if needed and are restricted to some area.

Monthly income differences do not seem to affect the response much as majority of the journalists in each category of income range from 10,000 to more than 60,000 responded that they need to follow the administrative instructions for planning coverage of an event.

It was interesting to observe that most of the freelance journalists (50%) have found to be free in following the administrative instructions. The reason might be behind it that they are not bound to the organizations they work for as compared to the other permanent or regular employees. Considering the same reason it was observed that permanent and contract and temporary journalists are high in numbers who that said they need to follow the administrative instruction while planning or coverage for an event with 61% and 53% respectively.

Table 2. Level of autonomy

		<i>Level of Autonomy (Positive)</i>		
		<i>Operational</i>	<i>Allocative</i>	<i>Administrative</i>
		50%	36%	29%
Gender	Female	31%	50%	81%
	Male	55%	33%	64%

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to explore and analyze the ground realities under which the journalists of Rawalpindi and Islamabad have to perform their professional duties. Demographic details of journalists working in the region of Rawalpindi and Islamabad exposed some interesting facts. The overall generation of journalists working in different media organizations, are mostly from the age group of 20-40years old, while a meager ratio of senior journalists working in this profession is calculated; a clear indication that the profession is just positively reinforcing young while not utilizing the experience of senior journalists. A vast majority of journalists fall into the category having the earning of Rs10,000 to 20,000 incomes whereas the percentage of those who are earning more than Rs20,000 is lower.

Although an overview of the journalists demographic detail does not give a positive image of this profession with low income, lack of experienced personals, nevertheless it was interesting to note that majority of these journalists are qualified by holding master degrees. The findings about the education level endorsed the research survey by ³Malik (2000).

Although previous researches do not endorse any significant relationship between demographic variables and its linkage with organization or social variables except for Pollard's finding (Pollard, 1995).

These all demographic variables, among them mostly which are tested in previous researches are age, gender, education and marital status are found to be influencing the responses on the level of autonomy they enjoy from their respective organizations.

Lately Pakistan has witnessed the emergence of new multimedia groups, owned by important economic conglomerates that count with a diversified production of magazines, local and national newspapers, radio stations, cable television, and Internet. This eventually is allowing them to work in their own way, irrespective of some basic journalism standards. Therefore journalists are even deprived of their basic rights as low income and less autonomous in their beats.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

³ www.jrc/syberwurx.com Retrieved on January, 2010.

Limitations are unavoidable in any research study, so this study is no exception. The limitations of this research study open space for future researches which may be conducted in the field of journalism and concerning journalists. Due to length of survey, some job characteristics which may be involved in the organizational settings could not be included, e.g. 'deadline pressure' a part of routines of news gathering approach and staff size (Chang & Massey 2008).

Another limitation of this study is sampling method and its size, as no confirmed lists of the journalists could be found. So journalists in all the organizations, covering every beat could not be surveyed and the researcher had to rely on the convenient sampling method which affects the equal chance of participation.

The surveys were distributed in Rawalpindi and Islamabad press clubs, could not generate a good turnout. Using online access to fill out the survey was also challenging as sometimes emails to journalists are received as spam which may go unnoticed. Future researches can look into these areas and can try to overcome these limitations.

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