

# **MEDIA ETHICS AND RESPONSIBILITY: ANALYSIS OF GEO NEWS AND ARY NEWS' COVERAGE ON HAMID MIR'S ISSUE**

*\*Dr. Khalid Sultan, Ashraf Iqbal, Zoha Khalid, Saulat Ali*

## **Abstract**

The news regarding the attack on journalist Hamid Mir had been reported on every TV channel in Pakistan. Geo News, allegedly distinguished itself in coverage, aimed at maligning and defaming Director General (DG) of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) by repeatedly flashing his picture on the Breaking news broadcast for at least eight hours on April 19, 2014. Following this onslaught, ARY News resorted to counter the Geo News contents. Research aims to investigate deviation from Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Codes of Conduct, ethics, moral principles and responsibilities in their news and current affairs programs coverage taking Hamid Mir episode as a case? Data analyzed through percentage distribution and on NTSYS pc. For the hierarchical cluster analysis, UPGMA (Unweight Pair Group Method with Arithmetic Mean) method was applied through the software, NTSYS. Result indicates that both the channels has had violated some of the PEMRA's Code of Conduct.

**Key Words:** Ethics education, social responsibility, media

## **Introduction**

The role of the media, the Fourth Estate, as an influencer of public opinion has always been recognized by governments. Media freedom is generally accepted as a corner stone of modern democratic society. However there is also an acute awareness that the media should be responsible in what and how it reports and also clearly distinguish disseminating information from analysis and opinions (Ravi, 2014). Freedom has an obvious claim to be considered as the basic principle of any theory of public communication, from which other benefits should flow. The most central concept in media theory relating to information quality has probably been that of objectivity, especially as applied to news information (Mc Quail, 2012, pp.192, 200). Interpretive scholars seek truth as well, but they are much more tentative about the possibility of revealing objective reality. Scientists assume that Truth is singular. There's one reality "out there," waiting to be discovered (Griffin, 2006,

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*\*Department of Communication Studies, College of Applied Sciences, Oman  
Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, GC University, Faisalabad  
Pakistan  
PhD, Fellow, Department of Communication, Awang Had Salleh Graduate School of  
Arts and Sciences, University Utara Malaysia  
College of Applied Sciences, MoHE, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman*

p.10). A primary purpose of ethical standards in free media is to protect the rights of those who might be exposed to misrepresentation; still the media workers have room for maneuver in making day-to-day editorial decisions (Chalaby, 2005, p.86). Ethical standards in journalism lay emphasis on being responsible, truthful, objective, and reasonable in collecting news and publishing it (Elahi, 2013, p.190). Klapper (1960) proposed that several elements intercede between a message and one's response so that, in most instances, media messages that are intended to persuade actually reinforce existing attitudes. These mediating factors are: individual predispositions and selective perception processes, group norms, message dissemination via interpersonal channels, opinion leadership, and the free-enterprise nature of mass media in some societies (Bryant, 1994, p.471). The philosophy of "reporter as attack dog" makes its way into local news reporting as well, generating a lot of unnecessary hostility between news sources and inexperienced reporters who are following a stereotype (Whitaker, 2009, p.30). In any case, apparently, news is filtered at the information desk but in practice, each media company adopts a particular way of reporting and presenting the news, sets the agenda, policies, contents which determine how it will cover a particular issue.

The aforementioned paragraph speaks about the general trend at the global level. A deeper look into the issue from the South Asian perspective shows that the past fifteen years have transformed the media scene across South Asia. Until the 1980's media systems were generally national in scope. While there have been imports of books, films, music, and TV shows for decades, the basic broadcasting system and newspaper industries were domestically owned and regulated. Beginning in the 1980's pressure from the IMF, World Bank and US government to deregulate and privatize media and communication systems coincided with new satellite and digital technologies, resulting in the rise of transnational digital giants (Andersen, 2006, p.59).

The historical evolution of the media in Pakistan underlines an interesting state of affairs, whereby all the original owners of print media were individuals with a background in journalism and often with a defined political/nationalist agenda. However, since the electronic media liberalization of 2002, the situation has changed, with many media owners operating purely according to commercial interests and with no

professional attachment to journalism (Mezzera, 2010, p.8) The massive boom of Pakistan electronic media in 2002, resulted in the issuance and approvals of licenses to operate and broadcast according to the parameters as devised by Pakistan Electronic Media and Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). A cut-throat competition started among the budding channels amongst one another; however, two channels appeared to be potential competitors. These two media rivals 'Geo News and ARY News are known for their high viewership and highly-paid and skilled journalists that they employed since their inception. One such prominent and a seasoned journalist Hamid Mir, attached to Geo News grabbed most of the lime light for his program 'Capital Talk', aired live in which he would touch the most sensitive issues with the concerned big-wigs. During his professional span he was both rewarded and ridiculed. In 2007, Hamid Mir was banned by President Musharraf for four months following his live coverage of the lawyer's protest against the suspension of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He was banned again in June, 2008 by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government for few days for his endeavor to investigate the mysterious assassination of Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister of Pakistan. He was awarded Hilal-e-Pakistan which is the second highest civilian award in Pakistan, in 2012 by the same government. Just 2-years earlier than that, his name stirred a controversy through an audio tape of his conversation with one of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Commander, but nothing was proved against him in the court. He escaped an attempt on his life when an explosive device was found and later defused under his car in November, 2012 but on April 19, 2014; he came under serious attack in Karachi and was wounded and hospitalized as a result.

Soon after the attack, his brother, Amir Mir, who is also a journalist, said in a statement that the TV anchor had earlier expressed fears the ISI might try to kill him. Geo News ran this statement for several hours against the backdrop of Gen Islam's picture—a move that many interpreted as an indictment of the general before an investigation could prove him or the ISI guilty. It was also unprecedented. While the role of ISI has figured in public discourse in recent years, it has never been directly accused of any wrongdoing (Khan, 2014). Following the onslaught by Geo News, its competitor ARY News resorted to counter its content through its news and current affairs coverage.

The aftermath of the poles apart policy saw a media war and blame game between Geo News and ARY News violating all ethical standards and even some of the PEMRA code of conduct. Ethical standards in journalism lay emphasis on being responsible, truthful, objective, and reasonable in collecting news and publishing it (De Beer & Froneman, 1994). Geo News sensationalized and depicting the general as the master mind of the attack. The eight-hour transmission painted the national institution as a rouge agency to the viewer's not only in Pakistan but across the world. Geo News has failed to remain independent during these critical moments as it establishes that the press is politicized and biased in their reporting. This caused not only a furor among different stakeholders of the electronic media but also a visible rift occurred between Geo News and ARY News. Both channels openly criticized one another through news strips, talk shows, live commentaries, opinion polls and chronological bits sifted from their archives. It was exactly after 36 days of the attack on Hamid Mir when the Jang group on May 26, 2014 realized and admitted that the broadcast of its channel i.e. Geo News on that issue has been irresponsible. The group in their media broadcast and newspapers advertisements on front page carried a clarification stating: "It was never our intention to malign or offend any institution or person. These allegations stated earlier by Hamid Mir himself, were repeated by a member of his family soon after the incident. Our motive has always been to play our humble role for strengthening institutions through a process of engagement, and balanced and informed debates which are the hallmark of responsible and independent journalism. After serious introspection, editorial debates, feedback and engagement with all parties, directly and indirectly, we have concluded that our coverage immediately after the tragic and unnerving attack on Hamid Mir on April 19<sup>th</sup> was excessive, distressful and emotional". Following Geo News public acknowledgement in print and electronic media, the PEMRA on June 6, 2014 suspended its broadcast for 15 days. It also imposed fine to the tune of Rs.10 million. Later on June 20, 2014, the PEMRA through a press release unanimously decided to suspend the license of ARY News for a period of 15 days and imposed fine of Rs.10 million. The press release stated:

The 97<sup>th</sup> Authority meeting of PEMRA was held on 20.6.2014 at PEMRA Headquarter Islamabad. Besides

other agenda items, the Authority deliberated upon the matter of violations committed by Geo Entertainment and ARY News. The Authority, after detailed discussions, while considering all the relevant provision of PEMRA Laws, took a serious notice of violations committed by Geo Entertainment and ARY News. The authority unanimously decided to immediately suspend the license of Geo Entertainment for a period of 30 days and imposed fine of Rs.10 million. The authority also banned program "*UthoJago Pakistan*" aired on Geo Entertainment its entire team including host Ms. ShaistaLodhi, producer etc. forthwith, besides banning the rebroadcasting of this program on any channel.

Regarding the violations committed by ARY News, the Authority unanimously decided to immediately suspend the license of ARY News for a period of 15 days and impose fine of Rs.10 million. The Authority also banned program "*KharaSach*" aired by ARY News and its anchorperson MubasherLuqman, forthwith on persistently airing contemptuous and malicious campaign against judiciary.

It is in this backdrop of professional rivalry and creative upmanship resulting in deteriorating moral and professional ethics of main stream news media that this study is conducted. This research aims to ascertain the public opinion about the maturity and responsibility of Geo News and ARY News channels and also to understand the width and breadth of contents presented in accordance with the binding PEMRA'S Code of Conduct. It shall also focus on whether there are external forces involved to portray a mass mediated view which are steering the agendas of these TV channels or not and in case there are such forces involved; then to which extent their influence can possibly be reckoned? This paper also measures the perspective that how far the Geo News has tarnished the image of some state owned institution/s Added to this, one more objective is to see whether the contents which are presented to viewers are those created by individual journalists and anchor persons or dictated to them by their employers/organizations or external forces? The research is carried out taking the assassination attempt on Hamid Mir as

a case. Purposively selected samples of 245 respondents, of which 208 (85%) are from mass media background, are selected for the study to acquire the data. Focus group discussions and interviews with the professionals in mass media were also conducted. The data was gathered through the questionnaire which was distributed on hard and soft copies. The data from the questionnaires were transferred to an MS Excel worksheet. Data analyzed through percentage distribution and on NTSYS pc. For the hierarchical cluster analysis, UPGMA (Unweight Pair Group Method with Arithmetic Mean) method was applied through the software, NTSYS. Electronic tool i.e. Facebook, e mail were also used.

### **Media and Governance in Pakistan**

Governance involves various groups and organizations at many levels which cooperate with each other towards the achievement of common goals. It demands a participatory approach and media form an integral part of the process. It mainly depends on the prevailing situation; if democracy prevails in a state and civil society allowed playing their role in good governance. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons the participatory culture could not evolve in Pakistan (Syed, 2013). Media in Pakistan work at a cracking pace. On all platforms of journalism media compete fiercely for market and audience share. However, many people, including those inside media, worry that in this overheated atmosphere standards of journalism and media governance are put under strain (EJN, 2014 p.15). The government tactics against its critics include the traditional slashing down the advertisement share of such media organizations and letting the tax investigators take on tax evasion cases against the targeted media group. On the other hand, many media groups also live in glass houses, so when they cast a stone on the powerful political forces they retaliate (Ayaz, 2010). The curtailing freedom both by civil and military regimes badly affected this participatory process. Eventually people find other avenues to participate to ensure good governance and media is no exception in this process. A number of events contributed to the media's role in participatory process.

In March 2007, President General Musharraf dismissed the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. The legal fraternity resisted this action and a country wide

movement was launched which ended in the reinstatement of the higher judiciary. This movement was greatly strengthened by the active participation of various segments of the civil society, particularly the media (Mezzera, 2010).

Since its liberalization from the government clichés, the media is playing a positive role in bringing up the problems of governance, exposing scandals and strengthening democracy. Governmental representatives are very much frequent to various TV talk shows and the discussion held there provokes a public debate on burning issues. The media has helped in shaping public opinion and creating socially and politically aware and active society in Pakistan. The past one decade has witnessed a tremendous growth in reach and quality of mass media in Pakistan. The number of print and particularly broadcast media outlets has increased substantially. There are dozens of newspapers, ranging from the large English- and Urdu-language dailies and weeklies, to the small local-language papers. The number of television channels grew from two or three state-run stations in 2000 to over 50 privately owned channels in 2008. Marketing research company Gallup Pakistan, estimated there were 86 million TV viewers in Pakistan in 2009. Of these, 48 million - more than half, were terrestrial viewers who could only receive PTV channels. About 20 channels exclusively broadcast news, with only two of them in English (Dawn and Express). There are about five religious channels, which produce programs related to Islam, but which also deal with social issues. Moreover, as the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance of June 2007 demonstrated, the media's autonomy is far from institutionalized. The government uses a range of legal and constitutional powers to curb press freedom. The shutting down of private TV news channels accompanied the declaration of a state of emergency in late 2007, and the law on blasphemy has been used against journalists.

### **Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA)**

Regulatory influences occur at many levels and take different forms among the electronic media. Through its executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the federal government provides the main sources of regulatory influence in various departments and agencies (Albarran, 2002, p.271). According to NajamSethi, the media has always resisted a

regulatory body, whether it's from the government or a self-regulatory body. "I have sat in many media delegations myself to persuade to the government that we do not need them to regulate and that we can do it ourselves, but that never happens", he told The Express Tribune (Abid, 2012). The federal cabinet in January 2002 creates an autonomous regulatory authority for an independent electronic media. Established two years earlier as the Regulatory Authority for Media Broadcast Organizations (RAMBO), this authority was eventually renamed the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA).

This study will ascertain the following three points of the PEMRA code of conduct for media broadcasters regarding its programming. According to it no program shall be aired; (1) contains anything defamatory or knowingly false; (2) contains aspersions against the Judiciary and integrity of the Armed Forces of Pakistan and (3) maligns or slanders any individual in person or certain groups, segments of social, public and moral life of the country.

### **Media Freedom and Responsibility**

The outcome of the focused group discussion and many of the interviewees indicated the media's lack of maturity and professionalism as one of the biggest obstacles to objective and truly independent journalism. Some also referred to the nearly total absence of social issues from the national news as a sign of qualitative journalism. They pointed to the fact that ordinary people were hardly making any news in today's Pakistan. "The media is in a state of anarchy and people have no sense of responsibility", said journalist Najam Sethi who is the editor of The Friday Times and host a current affairs program (Abid, 2012). On the contrary, most of the media outlets would either operate as an adjunct mouthpiece of the establishment, or they would go for a highly controversial scoop, no matter if it were based on scant or non-existent evidence, or if it could become a potential trigger of political and social unrest.

Periodically, the world of media becomes entangled in its own "wars": TV news and reports, articles and editorials strongly denounce the Other, and the Other replies with its own accusations (Le, 2006). The criticism, allegations and counter allegations' between the Geo News and ARY News since April 19, 2014 has supported the view that media



owners of the aforementioned news channels are serving their paymasters and so are following their vested interest policy and therefore has successfully engaged the media in an alliance of self-interest. This has been put by Simon Cottle as;

It dominate sources and elite power....were at work on this case, at least it was apparent that they were not completely controlling the media narrative....[The Media] purposefully propelled the story forward on the public stage and generalized the case to a wider readership or audience... They were inside the frame and often reconfiguring it as the moved forward (Cottle, 2004: 25).

On the other side, journalists are not free agents. They are constrained by a set of complex relations that led them to reproduce day after day the opinions and views of establishment figures, especially high government officials. They are constrained by broad conventional wisdom that they are not well placed to buck and they are powerfully constrained by the conventions and routines of their own professionalism (Schudson, 2009, p.61). Furthermore, due to their inadequate academic and professional expertise, most Pakistani journalists are not trained to understand, investigate and analyze the complex issues related to politics, conflict and extremism. Instead, personal biases and sensationalism dominate their stories.

### **Code of Conduct / Ethics / Morals**

There is no universally accepted code of ethics in the electronic media. An organization may adopt its own code of ethics, which may be written or simply implied (Albarran, 2002, p.53). But what exactly is ethics, and how does it differ from morals? Moral is derived from the Latin *mos, moris*, meaning (among other things) "way of life" or "conduct." It is often associated with religious beliefs and personal behavior. Ethics, on the other hand, is derived from Greek *ethos*, meaning "custom," "usage," or "character." It is often thought of as a rational process applying established principles when two moral obligations collide. The most difficult ethical dilemmas occur when conflicts arise between two "right" moral obligations. Thus, ethics often involves the balancing of competing rights when there is no "correct" answer (Day, 2006, p.3). "Doing ethics" involves much more than simply picking a set of

principles, values, etc., and then applying these in a largely deductive, algorithmic manner to a problem in hand. Rather, our central ethical difficulties are difficult in large measure because they require us to first determine which principles, values, framework, etc., in fact apply to a given problem – a determination that Aristotle famously associated with the capacity for *practical judgment or phronesis* (Ess, 2009, p. 170). Ethical judgments are like that. No matter who makes them, they are seldom easy, and they are almost certain to strike some of us as perfectly proper while others regard them as wrong-headed, stupid, unfair, and—possibly—as evidence of intellectual and/or moral decay (Day, 2006, P.3). They act as signs that constantly provide directions to news professionals (Anderson & Leigh, 1992). If the media have five key functions – to inform, filter, analyze, investigate, and speak for the people—then accusing the media of bias suggests that they are not conducting one or all of those functions in an objective fashion. At its core, the media's job is to take political reality in all its messy complexity and vast substance and transmit the most important elements in a way that will be comprehensible and useful to the citizenry. No matter how much media strive for objectivity, of course, the picture will be incomplete; reality cannot be accurately summarized by even the most conscientious journalist. Something is inevitably lost "in translation." But most of the complaints about media bias in the media allege that the media intentionally twist reality to fit some political agenda (Mayer, 2008). Despite debate surrounding the effectiveness of code of ethics, it should be remembered that the main purpose of code of ethics is to provide ethical guidance. It is up to news professionals whether they want to follow those guidelines or not. Ethics codes are considered largely self-determined, voluntary conduct (Merrill, 1974). The many different codes reflects differences in the conventions and tradition of the country concerned and the relative influence of different interested parties – publishers, editors, journalists, or an external regulatory body. Most codes concentrate on the provision of reliable information and on avoiding distortion, suppression, bias, sensationalism and the invasion of privacy (Harris, 1992, pp.62-76).

The first Code of Ethics in Pakistan was approved by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) as early as 1949. Journalism ethics are frequently compromised in Pakistan's competitive,

poorly regulated media market. Veteran journalist Zamir Niazi describes how military and civilian governments since the 1960s have paid off journalists to promote the military establishments or ruling party's official stance in the press (Niazi, 1994). Corruption occurs at the highest levels: the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting admitted that it maintains an unaudited Secret Expenditure fund, which it claims is used to ensure the "welfare of journalists" and which was worth up to PKR 120 million (US\$1.2 million) in the 2012–2013 financial year (the fund was worth PKR 153.5 million, or US\$1.5 million, in 2011–2012 (Express Tribune, 2012). Interestingly none of the allegations of corruption against journalists has been proven till date.

### **Medias' Commercial Interests**

Another important issue to be taken into consideration pertains to the alleged motives for media owners to enter the media business in the first place. In the mid-2000s, a Pew Research Center for the People and the Press report found that a majority of journalists believed increased attention for the business side of journalism was damaging the news quality and another survey found that a good majority of media workers believed journalistic standards had worsened (Stoll and McManus, 2005). Journalism in small communities may be more in danger. A study found that advertising sales persons at chain-owned newspapers and small papers were more apt to choose the options that hurt editorial independence to please advertisers (Soontae and Bergen, 2007). Kelly McBride, ethics group leader at Poynter Institute, says she is concerned journalism may lose credibility from the audience as the business side tries new ways of making money. It will get more and more difficult for the audience to distinguish what is the work of independent journalism and what is the product of advertiser's influence (Pompilio, 2009).

Some industry observers propose people around news media, whether journalists or advertisers, should work together, creatively. Martha Steffens, journalism professor at University of Missouri, writes because in-text advertisements do bring in the revenue to sustain quality journalism, people in the media should "control" the practice rather than ban it at all (2007). Robert Niles, editor of Online Journalism Review, says advertisers are not necessarily attempting to control the day-to-day

coverage. Rather, they want their advertising to appear close to an article on a certain subject (Pompilio, 2009).

Others argue that the media in Pakistan has become one of the power holders, along with the bourgeoisie and the army, and that it is taking the common people 'for a ride' in the name of democracy. On the contrary, 'democracy and a free media are sacrificed at the altar of the free-market economy which is the linchpin of capitalism'. Firstly, it is indeed the marketing managers of the media groups who decide on the space and coverage of issues. Secondly, the owners exercise a tremendous influence on space and coverage of the news reports, on administrative matters, and on the editorial policy, which is drafted in accordance with their political and commercial interests. Thirdly, this category of the media owners has meanwhile managed to target and take over the representative institution of the professional editors. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) secretary general was bold in criticizing media houses who are not paying their journalists decent salaries, for blocking the wage-board awards, for not providing insurance cover and training journalists who cover conflict areas and lay down their lives, and for laying off hundreds of workers at short notice without compensation and for not paying wages on time (Ayaz, 2010). By doing so, the previous division between editorial and administrative policies, which provided some space for unbiased journalism, has ceased to exist. The outcome of the increased importance of these commercial factors can be seen in the disproportionately high number of advertisements and of news and analysis concerning politics in both print and electronic media. What is left is negligible space for coverage of social issues, which, along with human rights issues, are not on the agenda of most of the Pakistani media. With regard to the issue of commercial interests and their influence in the Pakistani media landscape, advertisements certainly play an important role. Within that landscape, the state occupies an important position, with a 25 percent stake in the advertisement budgets of the regional press. Thus, regional newspapers have at times faced pressures from this "advertising monopoly", which has a budget of about US\$20 million per annum. The consequence of this phenomenon is that the government uses this mammoth advertising budget to impose conditions on the regional newspapers' publication policies.

### **Influences and Mediation in Journalism**

The process of mass communication emerges as a constructive force, limited however, by its own interests and prejudices as well as by the degree of intellectual or creative power among individuals as spectators, whose successful intervention in the flow of mass communication introduces ideologically diverse world views (Hardt, 2004). When we experience strong mediated presence, our experience is that the technology has become part of the self, and the mediated reality to which we are attending has become an integrated part of the other. When this happens, there is no conscious effort of access to information, nor effort of action to overt responses. We can perceive and act directly as if unmediated (Bracken, 2010 p. 193). Again, media texts cannot show reality as it is; by their nature they mediate (Lacy, 1988 p.189). Generally, it presumes that media organizations are not really autonomous, but are presented by other sources of power (especially political and economic). The more it appears that outside forces shape the operation of media, the more plausible this hypothesis becomes (McQuail, 2012 p. 278). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, almost three generations have grown up in a mass-mediated environment, which defines their life world and provides the intellectual and emotional context for an understanding of their social and political existence (Hardt, 2004). The important question here is what factors inside and outside media organizations affect media content? The fact that we ask this question reveals that we do not assume that mass media content reflects objective reality. It does not mirror the world around us. Rather, media content is shaped by a variety of factors that result in different version of reality (Shoemaker, 1996 p.1). Day (2006) categorized conflicts of interest for media professionals into three broad categories: conflicting relationship, conflicting public participation, and vested interests and hidden agenda. In general, the theory that has been formulated on the basis of research into media organizations, while fragmentary, has been fairly consistent. It supports the view that content is systematically more influenced by organizational routines, practices and goals than by personal or ideological factor (McQuail, 2012 p.277). In addition to that the assumption that a journalist's attitudes influence his or her stories, organizational influence on content, and influences on content from outside of media organizations are the areas mentioned

heavily in the literature regarding such influences. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) presented five hypotheses about factors influencing content. They are;

- Content reflects social reality (mass media as mirror of society)
- Content is influenced by media workers' socialization and attitudes (a communication-centered approach)
- Content is influenced by media-organizational routines
- Contents is influenced by social institutions and forces outside the media
- Content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo (the hegemonic approach)

Regarding the journalists' attitude in influencing his or her story, Gans (1979) identifies these as ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership. Organizations differ in how they solve the problems of production. Media organizations in their relations with wider society are formally or informally regulated or influenced by normative expectations on either side (McQuail, 2012 p. 280). The owner's influenced can be for good or ill. The concerns of media scholars have changed with the nature of media ownership, but they continue to question how today owners have lives up to this responsibility. This responsibility has become greatly diffused, however. Fewer independent owners run their own media organizations, which have become but part of the larger corporate fabric (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 156). In one of the early classic studies in media sociology, Warren Breed asked how news organizations enforce "policy." By policy he meant not a firm's printed rules but the covert and "consistent orientation" of paper's news and editorials towards issues and events, revolving primarily around partisan, class, and racial divisions (Breed, 1955, p. 327). Extrinsic factors include the source of information that becomes media content, such as special interest groups, public relations campaigns, and even the news organizations themselves; revenue sources, such as advertisers and audiences; other social institutions; such as business and government; the economic environment; and technology (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 166). Several observers have emphasized the existence of an 'ideology of journalism', although there are different versions of what it contains, depending on the institutional setting and

national location (McQuail, 2012, p. 287). By ideology we mean a symbolic mechanism that serves as a cohesive and integrating force in society (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 212). In a thorough analysis of 'journalistic culture', Hanitsch (2007) lists the ideological elements of objectivism, empiricism and alternative ethical tendencies of either idealism or relativity. In understanding the mediation and influences in Journalism this research paper will base its premise on the aforementioned hypotheses.

### **Media Experts / Academic Perspective**

This study also comprises the view of many experts from media, research and scholastic from the discipline of mass communication studies. The views of media experts helps analyze the impact of exaggerated coverage on Hamid Mir issue on how it could twist the public opinion. Academics, on the other hand, provide inputs that analyze the implications of such partisan coverage on audience perception on the abuse of media freedom and disregard for media ethics.

Professor Dr. MugheesUddin Sheikh, in his Facebook post believes that national interest and truth: there are so many stories based on truth but not publishable..... These stories based on truth may provoke sectarianism, hatred or coercion in the society. Sometime a story may damage a country's defense policy too. I was shocked to read the advice of late Prof. Waris Mir described by his son Amir Mir that he used to advocate that truth should be given preference over national interest. I was his student in early 70's and worked as his colleague in 80's.... I never found saying anything like this. Should I say at this moment that Amir Mir has quite different ideology that Hamid Mir and Waris Mir has had? It seems as if Amir has played on Hamid on this unhappy and sad incident and damaged his just cause and sacrifice for freedom of expression and human rights.

Another prominent figure of media studies, Adnan Rehmat in his post titled "Media Jumping the Gun" revealed that Amir Mir's allegations against ISI of alleged involvement in the attack on his brother were made on live TV when Hamid Mir was in a critical condition and not expected to survive. Had Geo TV waited until Hamid Mir recovered and given him the right to make his own allegations, things would have panned out differently and media would not have descended into internecine wars to

settle their own scores against each other? It seems that in the typical fashion on Pakistani TV channels' penchant of 'breaking news' when the news hadn't properly 'broken out,' Geo TV simply assumed Hamid Mir will not survive. The result: 'murder allegations' were made when 'murder' was not 'complete.' Sad. This is a classic case study on the need for an editor to filter out carelessness from real-time media.

Shakil Chaudhary a well-known media man and one of the former political Affairs Specialist of the US Embassy in Islamabad in his take on the issue disclosed that as for the Geo-ARY controversy, both can be criticized. Most experts would say that Geo made an error of editorial judgment. They should not have flashed the photograph of the chief of the ISI, the most powerful intelligence agency in the country. Its critics point out that while reporting the conviction of those involved in Wali Khan Babar's murderer, Geo did not flash the photograph of Altaf Hussain, the MQM supremo. However, Geo says that it had only reported the allegations of Amir Mir, and airing them did not represent their endorsement. If one takes a look at this controversy with academy objectivity, one has to ask: If Geo chickened out by not linking Wali Babar's killers to MQM, why is it that all other TV channels followed suit? The other question that can be asked: Geo made a mistake by flashing the ISI chief's photograph, but did all other channels do the right thing by completely blacking out Amir Mir's press conference? Should some institutions be above scrutiny and above criticism? Geo's critics are saying that institutions of national security should never be criticized. Anyone who believes in democracy and free speech would find it extremely hard to agree with this argument. In fact, agreeing with this argument would make a mockery of democracy and free speech. Can any democracy worth the name have this approach?

Journalist turned diplomat, Khurshid Marwat in his Facebook message on April 21, 2014 observed that it is interesting to see how Geo desperately tried to downplay today their own hype created against a state institution the other day. It was a classic case of yellow journalism the other day. The injured journalist was in critical condition and this channel was vilifying vociferously a state institution. The owner of the channel Mir Ibrahim Rehman was my junior at Harvard and is a friend but occasionally I send him a message criticizing the way his channel is behaving. I guess they realized today that they went beyond the limits of



decency the other day. As a diplomat I can say that this unwarranted propaganda must have damaged the image of Pakistan tremendously in international arena.

### **Methodology**

The qualitative survey method was adopted for the study and the universe included every Pakistani with a minimum qualification of graduation. A sample of 245 respondents was drawn using purposive sampling method.

The data gathering instrument was a questionnaire with 28 Likert items on a six point scale using the nominal scale of measurement. The questionnaire was tested for content validity by submitting it to a panel of experts- academics and journalists. The data was collected from April 25, 2014 to June 6, 2014. Five data collectors, four male and one female, who were media professionals were engaged to distribute and collect the questionnaire. Four in-depth interviews and two focus group discussion were conducted with academicians and senior journalist on the issue. Social media has also been used for this purpose. The professionals in mass media were selected through personal contacts.

The data from the questionnaires were transferred to an MS Excel worksheet. The data was analyzed through percentage distribution and on NTSYS pc. For the hierarchical cluster analysis, UPGMA (Unweight Pair Group Method with Arithmetic Mean) method was applied through the software, NTSYS pc (Rohlf, 2008). The distance matrix was calculated based on qualitative data. The distance matrix was then subjected to cluster analysis, finally the tree was plotted.

### **Research Questions**

- To what extent the Geo News and ARY News has had violated PEMRA's Code of Conduct in their news and current coverage on Hamid Mir issue.
- What are the dominant forces that affected the contents of Geo News and ARY News on Hamid Mir issue?

### **Analysis and Findings**

The survey findings revealed that out of the 245 sample size, 204 (83%) of the respondents are male with academic qualification of 164 (67%)

masters, 31 (13%) M. Phil, 29 (12%) Bachelor and 20 (8%) Ph.D. Majority of the respondents are from media and communication (85%) with 86 (35%) from electronic and 56 (23%) from print media with heavy exposure to TV channels in Pakistan. A sizeable number of respondents 133 (54%) do watch Pakistan TV channels for more than three hours a day. Exposure to Geo News and ARY News is also heavy as 124 (51%) watch Geo News and ARY News 'most of the time' and another 95 (39%) are exposed 'sometimes'. A great number 170 (69%) are 'fully aware' of the issue of attack on Hamid Mir. Whereas 53 (22%) are 'partially aware' of the issue.

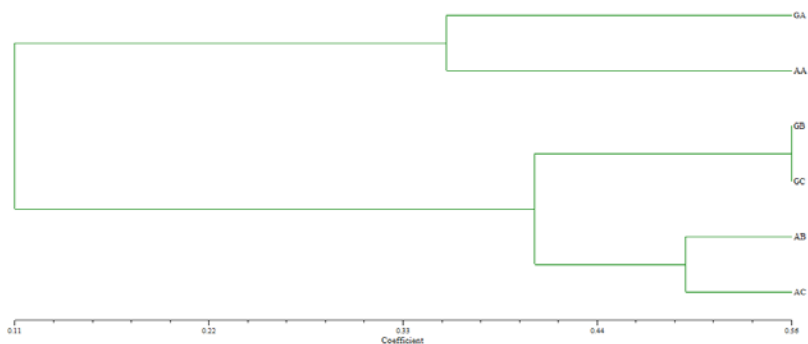
### **Code of Conduct**

PEMRA Code of Conduct for media broadcasters and implementations by Geo News and ARY News as per the survey explores the following.

- Seventy five percent of the respondents disagreed that TV channels in Pakistan are following PEMRA's Code of Conduct for media broadcast.
- Eighty one percent disagreed that Geo News is following PEMRA's Code of Conduct for media broadcast. The percentage is comparatively low for ARY News which is 73 percent.
- Violations of some of the PEMRA's Code of Conduct revealed that 72 percent 'Agreed' for Geo New. For ARY News it comes to 68 percent 'Agreed'.
- A considerable number of respondents 59 percent 'Agreed' to the statement that Geo News broadcast on Hamid Mir issue has been aimed at maligning and defaming some state owned institution/s.
- A significant number of respondent 70 percent 'Agreed' that Geo News has allocated out-of-proportion time in its news and current affairs broadcast on Hamid Mir issue.
- Fifty four percent of the respondents agreed that Geo News broadcast on Hamid Mir issue has helped in manufacturing the public consent against some of the state owned institution/s negatively.
- Seventy five percent 'Disagreed' that Geo News broadcast on Hamid Mir has been fair, accurate and unbiased. Similarly 73 percent of the respondents 'Disagreed' for ARY News.

- Eighty percent of the respondents for Geo News and 75 percent for ARY News disagreed that they had fulfilled all the journalistic responsibilities in its news and current affairs coverage on Hamid Mir issue.
- Further confirmation of our results was done by statistical multivariate analysis using hierarchical cluster analysis. The cluster analysis showed two major clusters, the larger one with factors B and C while the other cluster separated factor A from factor B and C (Figure 1). The first cluster was again sub-clustered TV channels, Geo and ARY, for factors B and C, rather than separating factors. In case of factor A, 72 percent of the respondents admitted PEMRA's Code of Conduct violations. Of which 47 percent 'Strongly agreed' and 25 percent 'Agreed' for Geo News. While for ARY News 68 percent of the respondents supported the idea of ranging from 45 percent 'Strongly agreed' to 23 percent 'Agreed'.

In case of Geo News, respondents unanimously considered factor B and C had effects on PEMRA'S Code of Conduct as 75 percent of the respondents either 'Strongly disagreed' or 'Disagreed' to factor B, while 80 percent 'Strongly disagreed' or 'Disagreed' for factor C. In case of ARY News, factor B and C were clustered together, however, there was slight difference in the opinions of respondents, due to which the cluster was formed at little distance. In case of ARY News 73 percent of the respondents either 'Strongly disagreed' or 'Disagreed' to factor B, while 75 percent 'Strongly disagreed' or 'Disagreed' for factor C. This result showed that the respondents were agreed that both the factors played the role in Hamid Mir issue.



**Figure 1: UPGMA cluster analysis of comparative codes of conducts on Hamid Mir Issue between Geo TV and ARY channel. GA, GB, GC, AA, AB, and AC are explained below:**

- GA:** Geo broadcast on Hamid Mir issue has violated some of the PEMRA's code of conduct in their news and current affairs coverage.
- GB:** Geo news and current affairs coverage on Hamid Mir issue has been fair, accurate and unbiased.
- GC:** Geo news and current affairs coverage on Hamid Mir issue has fulfilled all the journalistic responsibilities.
- AA:** ARY counter strategy on Geo news and current affairs broadcast on Hamid Mir issue violated some of the PEMRA's code of conduct.
- AB:** ARY stance on countering Geo on Hamid Mir issue has been fair, accurate and unbiased.
- AC:** ARY stance on countering Geo on Hamid Mir issue has fulfilled all the journalistic responsibilities.

### **Influences**

Influences on Geo News and ARY News coverage of Hamid Mir issue is studied in three aspects. These include; (1) Influences on contents from individual media worker (assumption that a journalist's attitudes influence his or her stories), (2) Organizational influences on contents and (3) influences from outside forces. The survey findings depict the organizational influence as a dominant factor for the "Mass Mediated View" by Geo News on Hamid Mir issue. Following are revealed.

- Fifty eight percent of the respondents agreed that Geo News contents on Hamid Mir issue were influenced / mediated by the organizational pressure.
- In the case of organizational influence on ARY News to counter Geo News on Hamid Mir issue the figures come to 62 percent.
- Twenty five percent of the respondents are 'Agreed' whereas another 13 percent 'Strongly agreed' that its contents were influenced/mediated by the factor 1. Again, a considerable number of respondents (20%) 'Disagreed' and another 5 percent 'Strongly disagreed' to it in the case of Geo. In the case of ARY somewhat similar trend is maintained i.e. 22 percent 'Agreed', 12

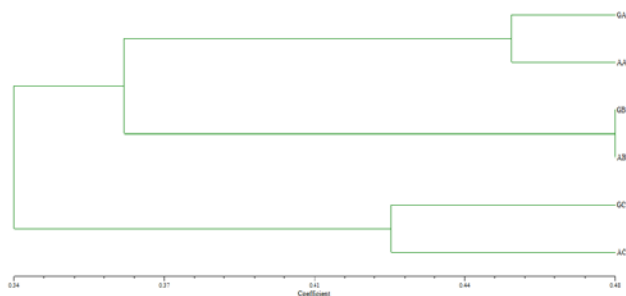
percent 'Strongly agreed', 25 percent 'Disagreed' and 5 percent 'Strongly Disagreed'.

- Twenty two percent marked 'Agreed' and 16 percent 'Strongly agreed' that Geo contents on Hamdi Mir issue were influenced/mediated by outside forces. The same for ARY remained at 21 percent as 'Agreed' and 12 percent 'Strongly agreed'.

Further confirmation of our results was done by statistical multivariate analysis using hierarchical cluster analysis for understanding various influences on Geo and ARY while covering Hamid Mir issue. According to it, Hierarchical Cluster Analysis of three factors (influences) while comparing Geo News and ARY News revealed that two major clusters were made (Figure 2). The first cluster consisted of factors A and B in both the cases of Geo and ARY, while the second cluster separated factor C from the first cluster.

In a first cluster, the respondents considered factor B had similar influence on both the Geo News and ARY News. While factor A was slightly separated into two sub-clusters i.e., Geo News and ARY News. Factor A showed 38 percent 'Agreed' and 34 percent 'Strongly agreed' for both the Geo News and ARY News; and factor B (organizational influence) had 58 percent 'Agreed' and 62 percent 'Strongly agreed' for Geo News and ARY News, respectively. In case of second sub-cluster, Geo News and ARY News for factor C were separated into two sub-clusters relatively at larger distance comparing to sub-cluster for factor A (Cluster 1)

These results showed that factor A and B together could make an influence on the decision on Hamid Mir Issue. Factor B had similar influence both on Geo News and ARY News. While factor C was separated completely from rest of the two factors. The reason for separating factor C (an outside influence) from the rest of the two factors might be an equal distribution of opinions in different categories (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, Don't know and No response). However, as a whole, 38 percent respondents 'Agreed' and 34 percent of the respondents 'Strongly agreed' on outside influences on Geo News and ARY New respectively. However, this percentage was comparatively lower than the percentages for factors A and factor B (organizational influence) for both Geo News and ARY News.



**Figure 2: UPGMA cluster analysis of comparative influences of various factors on Hamid Mir Issue between Geo TV and ARY channel. GA, GB, GC, AA, AB, and AC are explained below:**

- GA:** Geo stance on Hamid Mir issue is the result of influences on contents from individual media worker (assumption that a journalist's attitudes influence his or her stories).
- GB:** Geo stance on Hamid Mir issue is the result of organizational influences on contents.
- GC:** Geo stance on Hamid Mir issue is the result of influences from outside forces.
- AA:** ARY stance on countering Geo on Hamid Mir issue is the result of influences on contents from individual media worker (assumption that a journalist's attitudes influence his or her stories).
- AB:** ARY stance on countering Geo on Hamid Mir issue is the result of organizational influences on contents.
- AC:** ARY stance on countering Geo on Hamid Mir issue is the result of influences from outside forces.

## Conclusion

Review of literature, media text, experts' opinions, interviews, and the outcome of this research heavily support the idea that generally TV channels in Pakistan are heavily exploiting the media freedom. A considerable 75 percent of the respondents disagreed that TV channels in Pakistan are following PEMRA'S Code of Conduct for media broadcast. Geo News has surpassed this equation as 81 percent of the respondents disagreed that it is following such codes. For ARY News it is 73 percent.

Violations by Geo News and ARY News in the coverage of Hamid Mir issue also portray somewhat the same trend. It revealed that

176 respondents (72%) marked from 114 (47%) 'Agreed' to 62 (25%) 'Strongly agreed' for Geo News. Similarly the data on ARY News counter strategy on Geo News broadcast on the issue revealed that 168 respondents (68%) marked from 111 (45%) 'Agreed' to 57 (23%) 'Strongly agreed'.

The research findings suggests that both the channels has had violated some of the PEMRA's Code of Conduct. In particular, violations of (1) No program shall be aired which contains anything defamatory of knowingly false, (2) No program shall be aired which contains aspersions against the Judiciary and integrity of the Armed Forces of Pakistan, (3) No program shall be aired which maligns of slanders any individual in person or certain groups, segments of society, public and moral life of the country, (4) No program shall be aired which is against the basic cultural value, morality and good manners and (5) No program shall be aired which brings into contempt Pakistan or its people or tends to undermine its integrity or solidarity as an independent and sovereign country were made. Study findings of the aforementioned violations revealed the following:

- A considerable number of respondents 145 (59%) reported to 'Agreed' (39%) and 'Strongly agreed' (20%) to the statement that Geo News broadcast on Hamid Mir issue has been aimed at maligning and defaming some state owned institution/s.
- A significant number of respondent 172 (70%) agreed that Geo News has allocated out-of-proportion time in its news and current affairs broadcast on Hamid Mir issue. Of them 90 (37%) marked 'Agreed' whereas another 82 (33%) marked 'Strongly agreed'.
- Fifty four percent of the respondents agreed that Geo News broadcast on Hamid Mir issue has helped in manufacturing the public consent against some of the state owned institution/s negatively.
- Seventy five percent disagreed that Geo News broadcast on Hamid Mir has been fair, accurate and unbiased. Similarly 73 percent of the respondents disagreed that ARY News broadcast to counter Geo News on Hamid Mir has been fair, accurate and unbiased.

- Eighty percent of the respondents disagreed that Geo News has fulfilled all the journalistic responsibilities in its news and current affairs coverage on Hamid Mir issue. Whereas 75 percent of the respondents disagreed that ARY News has fulfilled all the journalistic responsibilities in its news and current affairs broadcast to counter Hamid Mir issue.

The dominant reason for influence on Geo News and ARY News as per the study findings is the organizational influence. Fifty eight percent of the respondents agreed that Geo News contents on Hamid Mir issue were influenced / mediated by the organizational pressure. In the case of organizational influence on ARY News to counter Geo News on Hamid Mir issue the figures comes to 62 percent.

The reasons for deteriorating standard of journalism, ethical violations and influences upon the media contents in Pakistan are numerous, some of them are mentioned below:

- Lack of professionalism in the mass media. Majority of the reporters, anchors, news readers, content controllers are not from the mass communication background academically. They also lack adequate, comprehensive training in journalism and media studies and journalism.
- Contents of the media are usually based on race, hysteria, hype and trivialization without any solid study and research.
- Monopoly of media houses with commercial and political interest. The long awaited demands by Prof. Dr. Mugheesuddin Sheikh regarding the question of cross media ownership in which he gave a slogan one group...one channel will help control such domination.
- Absence of effective enforced self-regulation mechanism.
- Legal and illegal borrowed media contents especially from India.
- PEMRA inability to enforce its laws and Code of Conduct.
- As pointed out by Pakistan media commission review is the tendency on the part of some sections of media to conduct criticism of civil and military institutions in terms that are remarkably similar to criticism of the same institution by sections of overseas media including Indian media, thereby adversely impacting internal national cohesion and solidarity



during a time when the country faces harsh internal as well as external threats.

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