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<b>Article:</b>	<b>Analysis of Perception of the listeners of BBC and VOA on the Pak-Afghan Border</b>
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**Abstract**

The study evaluated perception and opinion of the listeners of international radio services – British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA) – for Pakistan and Afghanistan listeners in their regional language i.e. Pushto. Similarly, Focused Group Discussions were held to analyze the nature of reporting of these two broadcasters and to eke out a strategy for constructive coverage of the war on terror. The results of the study showed that that majority of population living in border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, do not appreciate the involvement of outsiders in their matter but still there is a great scope for international broadcasters to shape the opinion of local as less than fifty percent population is still in the favor of West and perceived it as friendly. It was revealed that radio listeners of BBC and VOA in Pakistan and Afghanistan are in favor of using force against terrorism and militant groups. Contrary to that, they do believe the content of the BBC and VOA radio is leading them astray because the ground realities are different and these channels are portraying it differently. The researchers identified an array of issues that characterize reporting of these two broadcasters. These include serving the strategic interests of US and UK, propaganda and mass persuasion. The experts agreed that due to lack of alternative source of information in the border regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan was the key reason for the popularity of both BBC and VOA.

**Keywords: war on terror; propaganda; international broadcasters; survey; focus group discussions; alternative strategy.**

## Introduction

The literature on war and media suggests that states often resort to propaganda to maximize their strategic interests and influence public opinion during wars and conflicts (Lasswel, 1927; Knightly, 1975; Hallin, 1986; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Carruthers, 2011 and many others). From the First World War to the Iraqi invasion in 2003, these and other researchers have found that media openly supported the cause of their respective governments and compromised their editorial independence. According to Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), in all these major wars, journalists have happily surrendered the professional ethos of journalism and became propagandist and nationalistic.

Consistent with the above, after the attacks on US by Al-Qaeda in 2001, a global coalition was formed to defeat Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan (Marcela, 2009). Alongside the military operation that dislodged the Taliban government in Afghanistan, a substantial media promotion was launched by the UK and US governments to win support for their cause (Michael, 2007). As the Pakistan tribal areas bordering Afghanistan were also suspected to have got Taliban sympathizers, these areas are also getting a huge media attention. This study investigates the perceptions and opinions about the international broadcasters among the people living on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The researcher endeavors to find answers to a number of pertinent questions in this regard like how the people on the border areas perceive the roles of BBC and VOA, do they regard these channels providing them accurate information, and do the views of the people converge with the nature of the coverage and the likely effects of these channels? Similarly, this study also focuses on the performance of these radio channels through the perspective of Pakistani experts who were engaged in a focused group discussion by the researcher.

## **International broadcasters and propaganda**

Media's role in war times has been extensively studied in the context of propaganda research after the First World War (Lasswell, 1927 and Bernays, 1928). After the Second World War, there was some academic shift but the Vietnam invasion reignited the interest in the area (Hallin, 1986; Strobel, 1996). The invasions of certain Latin and Asian countries provided new impetus to the scholarly investigations (Chomsky and Herman 1988; Taylor, 1995). Most studies that investigate the relationship between war and media concentrate on the abuse of media for war advancement.

There are a variety of courses in which international broadcasters can control information so as to bend the message or spread misinformation, disturbing the musings and responses of the message saver. One clear approach to twist the facts is to just present one side of the story, and oppress or overlook information in fact. Be that as it may, with an end goal to be reasonable or fair in their reporting, news reports will regularly give equal broadcast time to the individuals who object to or deny inevitabilities. Such reporting can advance authenticity to the objector's argument and act to viewers as though the issue is still being mocked about, when most specialists have acknowledged a specific point as reality (Drescher, 2009).

Mowlana (1997) proposes a movement from the established perspective of international communication to a dream of international communication to mirror the full extent of communication between country states, foundations, gatherings and people crosswise over national, geological and social fringes. The expression "international communication" is likewise reflected in the titles of books, for example, *International Communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Stevenson 1994) and *International Communication and World Politics* (Tehrani 1999).

Hamelink (1994) likes to utilize the expression "world communication" as more comprehensive of both state and non-state on-screen characters.

As contended by Philip that if learning is power then dissemination of information must result in a dispersion of force and the control of this procedure is, in itself, a type of force. While it is not really shocking that those legislatures which fear the force of the media to shape the impression of their local populaces, to the point that they practice strict state control over those media, ought to likewise fear the force of international interchanges to undermine that very control, we do need to advise ourselves that the critical component here is undoubtedly control, not TV. All things considered, charge and control of communications has truly been seen to be a key to the upkeep of political force as it has to the accomplishment of military achievement. Internationalization and the commercialization of the media can consequently have all the earmarks of being the most recent dangers to the continuation of that control (Philip, 2003).

Researchers Junhao Hong examined and Shaojung Wang stated that Voice of America's (VOA) services established that the use of new information scenes has caused VOA to develop from a pure propaganda machine to an idea of informational soft power. However, they opine that not only is there a gap between VOA's target audiences and its actual website visitors but its website attracts more American and western users than users in the societies it intends to influence the most. The role of informational soft power in uttering attractive ideas, standards, customs and ethics through all manners of media and new information and communication technology to create the insight that United States hegemony is gentle postures challenges for its information strategy.

### **3.3 Research Questions**

R.Q.1: What is the perspective of listeners in Pakistan and Afghanistan on the performance of BBC and VOA?

- Hypothesis 1: Listeners agree that the two radio services reflect ground realities in the war-torn areas.
- Hypothesis 2: Listeners of both BBC and VOA strongly support the war on terror launched against Al Qaeda and Taliban both in Pakistan and Afghanistan
- Hypothesis 3: Listeners of the two services blame ISI for sponsoring terrorism in region.
- Hypothesis 4: Listeners of both BBC and VOA hold similar views about the important problems faced by the internally displaced people.

R.Q.2: What are prospects and challenges for ensuring constructive reporting of war on terror in international broadcasters?

### **Research Methodology**

For this study, the researchers have applied both survey and focused group discussion to evaluate the role of both BBC and VOA from the listeners residing on the border-region on Pakistan and Afghanistan. The researchers selected a total of 700 radio listeners residing in seven different areas each in Pakistan and Afghanistan as a sample of the study. The questionnaire was distributed in the selected areas on equal basis. As there is no authentic and systematic list of listeners of radio available, the researcher selected equal responders from each area to ensure that findings can be generalized to all target areas.

The sample distribution plan prepared for this study was constructed by taking into account the demographic, cultural and socio-economic factors of the population living in these areas. Seven areas of Pakistan including Mohmand Agency, Bajaur Agency, Swat, Buner, Charsadda, Bunnu and Taank and as many areas situated on the border line of Afghanistan namely Khost, Paktia, Laghman, Nangarhar, Kunar, Kabul and Paktika were included with equal number of sample size (50) for all the 14 regions(hence making a total of 700 respondents).

Similarly, for this purpose, twelve professionals from media and academia were contacted who are broadly recognized for their services and expertise on this subject and remained the part of this field for long period of time to participate in a focus group discussion. It was decided to conduct a series of focus groups to gauge the reaction of professionals who are affiliated with this profession in either way but due to financial constraints and time limitations the researcher restricts himself to organize one focus group discussion comprising a panel of five professional with the sound background knowledge on the issue.

A group discussion was held in Islamabad, capital city of Pakistan on May 10, 2016. The author of this study himself moderated the discussion and asked some key questions from participants of group discussion. Utmost effort was made to provide the participants' with open environment so that they could respond the in-depth questions prepared for the discussion without hesitation.

**Research Findings**

- Hypothesis 1: Listeners agree that the two radio services reflect ground realities in the war-torn areas.
- **Table 4.1**

Question	Aggregate disapproval	%	Aggregate approval	%	Total	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig
Ground realities reflected	321	50.4	316	49.6	637	0.039	0.843

- df=1

The results for Hypothesis as given in the above table suggest that the hypothesis is not supported. The higher p-value (0.843) indicates that the difference between cumulative agreement and disagreement is not statistically significant. The hypothesis stated that listeners

agree that the two radio services reflect ground realities in the war-torn areas. This means that listeners don't believe the content of the two radio services i.e. BBC and VOA and think that it is leading them astray because the ground realities are different and these channels are portraying it differently. The relevant literature on the subject reveals that if people do not believe on the veracity of information, media effects are not powerful. Hence despite the efforts of US and UK officials, the desired results could not be generated among the audiences through these services. The results of Focus Group with media practitioners and experts also illustrated the same side of radio effects on listeners. According to participants of FGD, the BBC & VOA Urdu service hardly portray the image of local community and international broadcasters are more interested in highlighting the positive image of the bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. Their contents are directed at the local community who are at the receiving end. The participants believed that multilingual radio service has the same agenda and would not differ from each other in terms of agenda setting.

Hypothesis 2: Listeners of both BBC and VOA strongly support the war on terror launched against Al Qaeda and Taliban both in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

**Table 4.2**

Questions	Disapprove	%	Approve	%	Total	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig
Terrorism is the most important issue	248	38.9	389	61.1	637	31.21	0
Normalcy	305	47.9	332	52.1	637	1.144	0.285
Global Support	275	43.2	362	56.8	637	11.882	0.001
Use of force	240	37.7	397	62.3	637	38.695	0.00
Factual Reporting	269	42.2	368	57.8	637	15.386	0.00

df=1



According to the table given above, it is shown that hypothesis 2 is supported. Majority of people living on Pakistan and Afghanistan border support the war on terror. This hypothesis is based on 5 questions; except for question that normalcy is returning to the region, the comparatively lesser p value suggests that difference between cumulative agreements for this war is statistically significant. On the basis of table, it can be inferred that listeners of BBC and VOA in Pakistan and Afghanistan are in favor of War on Terror going in the region.

Similarly, the experts participating in focus group organized for this study highlighted the same issue with the opinion that the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA) in their radio services for Afghanistan and Pakistan frame the issues relevant to this society in a larger and Western context. These contexts include the Western overall perspective about the Muslims, the West perspective about the third World, The political economy of Western media perspective, the so-called War on Terror Perspective etc. The issues pertaining to Pakistan and Afghanistan are framed in either of these perspectives and certainly BBC and VOA are very much actively pursuing their policies while framing the issues and setting the agenda relevant to Afghan and Pakistani society.

**Hypothesis 3: Listeners of the two services blame ISI for sponsoring terrorism in region.**

**Table 4.3**

Agency	Disagree	%	Agree	%	Total	Chi-Square
CIA	234	36.7	403	63.3	637	254.521 P Value 0.001
ISI	174	27.3	463	72.7	637	
Northern	295	46.3	342	53.7	637	

Most of the respondents who are direct consumers of BBC and VOA radio services blame spying agency of Pakistan ISI, for aiding the terrorism activities in both countries. It is evident that Pakistan has agreed the terms of USA on war against terrorism. In that context,

Pakistan security forces have paid a heavy cost and lost thousands of precious lives on the cause of war against terrorism. The locals residing on border areas are less likely aware of national plan and stance of Pakistan on war against terrorism, this very reason, to some extent, determine the perception of population living in areas included for this study. The statistical analysis approved the significance of hypothesis that audience of the two services (BBC and VOA) blame ISI for sponsoring terrorism in region. The low p value suggests the hypothesis is supported.

The group discussion in this regard confirms that Media is money consuming entities and the government would not fund media houses if it does not promote government's interest. Now as the war on terror is more complex, the media being the handmaiden of government simply follow them. If the governments concede that war on terror is unwanted, it is easy for media to chart a policy of neutrality and do good journalism. But in case of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the US and other states including Pakistan have many foreign interests which are the reasons that media simply confound the problem and forced to do negative propaganda than impartial and unbiased reporting.

**Hypothesis 4: Listeners of both BBC and VOA hold similar views about the important problems faced by the internally displaced people.**

**Table 4.4**

Channel	Theme	Disagree	%	Agree	%	Total	Chi Square	P value
VOA	Shelter and Food	245	38.5	392	61.5	637	33.923	0.00
BBC		218	34.2	419	65.8	637	63.424	0.00
VOA	Education	272	42.7	365	57.3	637	13.578	0.00
BBC		205	32.2	432	67.8	637	80.893	0.00
VOA	Rehabilitation	196	30.8	441	69.2	637	94.231	0.00
BBC		278	43.6	359	56.4	637	10.3	0.001

Internally dispersed persons or IDPs remained one of the core issues in conflict areas where the fight against terrorism was fought. The perception of local audience remained higher in terms of solving this issue by taking preemptive measures. The hypothesis 7 which was about similar views of listeners of BBC and VOA radio services about the major problems faced by IDPs was found significant in all three cases i.e. problem of shelter and food, education and rehabilitation. The p value of all cases is less than 0.005 that shows the relevance and significance of the hypothesis. Therefore, the hypothesis is approved and accepted.

The results of focus group discussion in this regard were also found similar. The participants concluded their discussion by posing the prime responsibility of promoting development issues on International broadcasters. It was maintained by the experts that international broadcasters have a huge role in regions and countries where the local media is not up to the task. It can raise issues of transparency, accountability and other elements of governance such as resource allocation more independently. It can arguably promote greater transparency and participation in government. As far as dispersed people rehab is concerned international media can play an important role if provided with proper access to the areas from where they have been displaced. Local media though enjoys more freedom as far as this access is concerned, but international media is restrained. On anti-terrorism strategies question, the participants specified that international media can question the genuine of intentions of the rulers, their capabilities and decisions more independently. The idea always is to after talking to relevant experts suggests reforms so that it is more comprehensive and coherent. They think that compared to local media, international broadcasters have little chance to create any scare or sensationalism hence it could be more useful. Among the participants it was also agreed that the international broadcasters can play an important role in all these areas provided they project the

issues objectively and give voice to the community. They can play an important role in education, health and nutritional awareness and income generating activities and peace initiatives. Their programs in Pushto can be more appropriate and effective.

**FG Question 1: What are your thoughts about the framing of the issues relevant to our society and agenda setting role of British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA) in their radio services for Afghanistan and Pakistan?**

**Outcomes:** The experts were of the view that the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA) in their radio services for Afghanistan and Pakistan frame the issues relevant to this society in a larger and Western context. These contexts include the Western overall perspective about the Muslims, the West perspective about the third World, The political economy of Western media perspective, the so-called War on Terror Perspective etc. The issues pertaining to Pakistan and Afghanistan are framed in either of these perspectives. Some Certainly BBC and VOA are very much actively pursuing their policies while framing the issues and setting the agenda relevant to Afghan and Pakistani society.

Some guests specified that the focus of these broadcasts is to do propaganda for the West and promote their interests, according to them. However to give the impression of impartial reporting, they do become critical of US policies sometimes. To some professionals, the international broadcasters frame Pakistan and its society as part of the problem, sponsoring terror and that to do more to defeat terror. They are more powerful as these are in regional language and common people to a large extent believe in them.

The discussion on this question could be summarized as the frames used in the contents on various socio-economic issues do not usually favor this society. International radio is framing

this region as if citizens' residing in this part of the world is consists on most downtrodden individuals of the world with prime needs.

**FG Question 2: In your Opinion, how International Broadcaster could effectively play his role to ensure peace and stability in Pakistan and Afghanistan and advocate a neutral part in bringing the two nations (Afghanistan and Pakistan) on same page against terrorism.**

**Outcomes:** When asked from the participants if the International Broadcasters could effectively play their role to ensure peace and stability in Pakistan and Afghanistan and advocate a neutral part in bringing the two nations (Afghanistan and Pakistan) on same page against terrorism, The pointed out some basic strategies to be adopted by the international broadcasters including by highlighting the real cause of terrorism, extremism and militancy, by stressing and digging out the core common issues of both countries, by ignoring the news, issues and matters that create split and differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan, not giving maximum coverage to those politicians, statesmen, and experts which time and again create controversies and differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan, opinions of those analysts would be materialized more and more who are neutral and want rapprochement between two neighborly states and international media should call upon both countries as both have common enemies.

The participants stated that the international broadcaster should realize upon Afghanistan that Pakistan is a benefactor of Afghanistan, who became a front line state against the USSR onslaught of Afghanistan in the decade of 80's, then Pakistan became a host to more than six million Afghan Refugees and finally Pakistan again became a front line state against the Taliban in the Global War on terror. For the sake of Afghanistan, Pakistan suffered irreparable loss in terms of drugs, smuggling, Weapon Culture and socio-economic loss.

Addition to that, the journalism is not about ensuring peace and stabilities, it is the job of the rulers and law enforcing agencies. Media is there to report what is actually happening on the ground without any exaggerations or prejudices, and of course not to aggravate any situation. Ideally, it cannot be independent if it starts taking sides or act as predictors. It can only report and get background analysis from relevant experts to pin point errors in strategies and suggest better options. But journalists have in their own personal articles and write-ups suggested better coordination and addressing issues of mistrust as a priority between the two neighboring countries.

The experts agreed that international broadcasters can play vital role in development of the community by sharing healthy information and programs but it is a wishful thinking that they will ever do that to bring the two nations on the same page. Rather their efforts had been keep them poles apart so that they can play their role with ulterior motives.

Media is money consuming entities and the government would not fund them if they do not promote their interests. Now as the war on terror is more complex, the media being the handmaiden of government simply follow them. If the governments concede that war on terror is unwanted, it is easy for media to chart a policy of neutrality and do good journalism. But in case of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the US and other states including Pakistan have many interests like countering china, weakening Pakistan and giving India more power, so in this context, media simply confound the problem and do propaganda than good journalism. The solution to this issue is they needed to be honest and set-aside from their defined agenda.

**FG Question 3: According to your opinion, what are the major workable solutions and valuable suggestions that may help local Radio listeners to segregate the propaganda out of messages propagating by International Broadcasters and how well they could utilizing these services for their socio-economic development.**

**Outcomes:**

The experts provided some workable solution for this matter. Some valuable solutions are as following:

1. The local media of Pakistan and Afghanistan should educate the people over the issue of foreign media propaganda.
2. Authorities of both countries should realize upon the people the vested interests of the World powers.
3. The private media owners, senior journalists and analysts should educate the people.
4. The local Radios should tell the truth so that they could gain the trust of the people as the local population do not trust over the local Radios and usually blame them for telling lie and concealing the truth from them.
5. The local radios should become more professional, objective and fair.
6. Listeners of international broadcasters should not be considered as ignorant. It would be like judging them wrongly. Even a politically conscious street vendor would know where the clever spin is coming from. We always get requests for more science and technology, health, sports and entertainment reports and programs than political content. By paying attention to these requests one can help them get better aware of opportunities.

7. The local audience should shun the foreign propaganda machinery of BBC & VOA and learn to trust, support and patronize the local broadcaster and media channels. There is a need of the capacity building and training of the local media professionals.
8. If people have strong critical sense, they filter out propaganda but common people cannot do it as they cannot differentiate between information and propaganda. They see many things for themselves and somehow get the power to differentiate reality from propaganda. If they hear that Pakistan soldiers are killed, they would trust that we are fighting Taliban and that we are the victims. Having said this, still there are strong chances for propaganda to succeed.
9. Good intelligent people and not vocalist entertainers are needed in the society.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The research questions mainly revolved around the perception of these two broadcasts among the listeners, exploring their opinions on war on terror and critical analysis of these broadcasts. The first hypothesis conjectured that people would trust these two broadcasters for providing timely information on events in the area. However, majority of people were convinced that these broadcasts had their own agendas and were making propaganda. Media dependency model says that during crisis times, people rely on media most and usually accept media messages. However, the respondents said ground realities were different and the information provided was not as accurate. To understand what people thought these broadcasts favored which party in this conflict, majority of them said that media favored Afghanistan over both Pakistan and USA. Literature suggests that people usually start supporting a party in a conflict if it reported in victimhood frame. In fact, there is a growing concern in Pakistan that though it has suffered immensely in this conflict, still it is a blamed for the problem in the region. Many in



Pakistan say that West has never supported Pakistan for its role in the war on terror and as revealed in this study; their media toe the same line.

One probably most interesting thing is the support for war on terror. Majority of people living on Pakistan and Afghanistan border support the war on terror. There is a debate both within Pakistan and Afghanistan that the war on terror is not successful because people on the border areas do not support it. However, this study finds that people of the area do not support the Taliban regime and want peace and development. Additionally, the researcher found strong case for propaganda effects of these two services when they were asked about the trouble making role of different agencies. Majority of people blame spying agency of Pakistan ISI, for aiding the terrorism activities in both countries. Both BBC and VOA have always casted the Pakistani ISI in bad perspective and the effects become evident here. The locals residing on border areas are less likely aware of national plan and stance of Pakistan on war against terrorism, this very reason, to some extent, determine the perception of population living in areas included for this study.

Majority of people believe that use of force instead of withdrawal of troops from the conflict areas or peace dialoged is not the durable solution for peace and stability in the region. The respondents are likely reluctant to speak against the militant groups as they do know the on ground realities as well as the agenda of armed people fighting for unjustified cause. Finally, the internally dispersed persons or IDPs remained one of the core issues in conflict areas where the fight against terrorism was fought. The perception of local audience remained higher in terms of solving this issue by taking preemptive measures. The hypothesis, was about similar views of listeners of BBC and VOA radio services about the major problems faced by IDPs was found significant in all three cases i.e. problem of shelter and food, education and rehabilitation.

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