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<b>Article:</b>	<b>Sectarian Conflict in Elite Newspapers of Pakistan: A Peace Journalism Perspective</b>
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### **Abstract**

Mass Media occupies a significant place in contemporary era of volatile changes and in a country like Pakistan, which is hovered by internal and external conflicts since its inception, it turns pivotal. The geo-strategic depth and ethno-political structure of the country has highlighted the sensitivity of media reporting and its implications on a wider scale. The ingrained private media outlets in 2000 have grown mature over the past 20 years. Yet the reporting dilemmas haunt the underdeveloped nation. The present study aims to explore the emerging sectarian unrest in the country and its coverage in elite English newspapers Dawn and The News over the years 2019, 2021 using census technique to examine the existence and frequency of war and peace frames by John Galtung, and thus finds the role of media escalatory in nature.

**Keywords:** Sectarian Conflict, War Journalism, Peace Journalism, escalatory

## Introduction

The growing role of media in contemporary socio-political discourse, turned out to be a dire need of time to be used for constructive purposes, and so has grabbed the attention of media scholars, policy makers and social activists. The last century marked revolutionary changes in the world scenario, and gave a new breadth and depth to the arising wars and conflicts, thus accentuating the de-escalatory role of mass media for defusing, neutralizing the conflicts. However, the dominant practices remained contrary, where the current mass media adopt conventional reporting styles of (if it bleeds, it leads) to increase ratings and profits, resulting in escalation of the tensions. (Ottosen, 2007). Wolfsfeld (2004) also noted the same in escalation of the conflict between Palestine and Israel in Oslo peace process when media ignored the positive developments.

The prevailing journalistic practices in reporting conflicts were more oriented towards 'War Journalism' and media's focus was on the visible effects of wars and conflicts and it provides little context to the causes and consequences of conflicts. Galtung (2006) refer to this dominant journalistic practices of conflict coverage as 'War Journalism' and proposed an alternative model to prevailing reporting practices as 'Peace Journalism'.

John Galtung's model of Peace Journalism soon became a curative measure to traditional conflict reporting practices, to deescalate the conflict. (Hussain & Lynch, 2018). He notably linked war journalism to sports journalism, as both were following the rule of zero-sum game, where winning is only thing that matters. Thus he proposed to follow the assumptions of health journalism in reporting conflicts, where in battle against disease is identified first and highlight the causes and share preventative measures (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000). Galtung identifies Peace Journalism as a voicing all strategy, for the greater good in society. Hence, it is identified to be "socially responsible Journalism" (Shinar 2007, Hantizsch 2004). Stepping on the footprints of John Galtung, Lynch and McGoldrick defined Peace Journalism as the choices made by reporters and editors about "what to report, and how to" which creates opportunities for the masses to accept the non-violent responses and solutions to a conflict (Lynch, 2015). The mass media reporting style has remained a matter of concern for media scholars in general and peace Journalism scholars in particular (Caron, 2010). A long history of theories of media effects, attitude and behavior change has provided enough evidence on media's role in influencing the public opinion (Mehraj, Neyaz, & Mehraj, 2014). Thus the role of media in deescalating any conflict cannot be ignored (The same has also been observed in de-escalating and ending the US-Vietnam war).

Galtung (1986) upholds the assumption to promote peace through balanced reporting of conflicts. He believes Peace Journalism to be an approach where the differences, clashes can be toned down by highlighting the peace initiatives while keeping in mind the social set up. Lynch (2005) also stresses on emphasizing the socio-cultural causes of violent conflicts instead of only discussing the polarization and dichotomies. Ersoy (2010) further postulates strength of peace journalism, and considers it a way of enhancing the participation of common people in everyday issues, and to enable them to play their role in democracy by keeping them well informed.

Galtung's model of Peace journalism consists of frames as conflict oriented, truth oriented, people oriented and solution oriented. And discusses war journalism as violence oriented propaganda oriented, elite oriented and victory oriented. Peace Journalism elements emphasis on balanced reporting, by highlighting the reasons /causes of the conflict. The second one aims at exposing both the parties involved in the conflict. Third one focus on peace makers and identifying the culprits and presenting the views /suffering of the people involved. On the other hand, 'war journalism' focuses on the dichotomies and apparent material /physical damages, to expose others and cover up lies. The third element focuses on the sufferings/ achievements of the elites and the last highlights the victory of one party.

### **Sectarian conflict in Pakistan**

Religion has always remained a sensitive issue in a state liberated on the name of religion. Soon after the Independence, the leadership gap welcomed the power hungry quacks and theocrats dismantling the basic notion of a welfare state. The seed of intolerance remained slothful until the era of Islamization under General Zia ul Haq government in Pakistan and Islamic revolution in neighboring Iran, shattering the bond between the two Muslim sects, Sunni and Shia in Pakistan.

The sense to maintain their own identity by avoiding conflicts and alienation with democratic and liberal forces have been strongly followed by the Shia community in the region. Even the mix sect gatherings, weddings, Sunni's participation in Shia rituals like Muharam Processions and Majalis, have remained a normal practice. The volatile decades of 1970-80 turned Shia's more Iranianized with in the country and turned Sunni's more Arabized; as a result of geopolitical changes and mass migration of Arabs to Pakistan in order to participate in Jihad and funding from Saudi Arabia for Madrassas. Soon violent outfits emerged among both sects and they started target killing religious leaders of opposite sect. It turned Pakistan as the battle ground of Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy war. The Shia groups drifted towards different options as per their socio-political status and some took up the arms to engage in violent activities (Abbas, 2010).

Zaman (1998) further highlighted the internal issues which aggravated the tensions between the both sects after independence. The sensitive issue of defining a Muslim identity in the constitution of Pakistan, the Ahmadi movement, zakat tax collection in General Zia-ul-haq era as per the Hanafi school of thought, are all the issues which kept on building tensions between the both sects. All these events coincided with the changing regional and international scenarios and led to radicalization of both the sects in the country; and marked the beginning of organized movements, campaigns, development of organizations, mosque and madrasa politicization.

The causes of escalating sectarian conflict are identified by a political scientist, (M.Waseem as cited in Ahmer, 2008) as the use of print media (Pamphlets and propaganda material distributed widely by sectarian organization to promote their narratives), the increased access to electronic means of communication and now social media, lastly the increased ease of mobility to plan and execute sectarian activities has amplified the conflict.

Munir (2017) identified that the issue of sectarianism is grave with multipronged effects on society. Reduction in foreign direct Investment affected the economic growth, disturbed the social balance and created unrest in the society and thus damaged the (Unity, Faith, Discipline) vision of Pakistan. The existing grievances have troubled the lives of the sects, living in inversely dominated areas such as FATA, where Taliban and Al-Qaida have been very active (Abbas, 2010). The same can be observed in the case of Hazara community living in Baluchistan and has been targeted by different groups (sectarian, anti –social) to seek their goals.

### **Literature review**

Shah (2019) explored the pertaining tensions between the two sect, Shia and Sunni in English leading newspapers of the country by implying mix method research technique and found the Shia representation positive and neutral coverage of the Sunni's, thus highlights that the identity of the victims is revealed in most of the cases and exhibits sectarianism as a dominant frame in the coverage of national dailies.

The current journalistic practices, peacemaking initiatives of media and the conflict ridden Pakistani society has called up the attention of media scholars to review the Peace Journalism model as per the social set up the country. It was found that elite-oriented contents dominating the mainstream media channels escalates the tensions and conflicts, thus

suggesting to consider the socio-political environment of the country prior to the mere application of Peace Journalism model (Hussain, Siraj, & Mahmood, 2019; Lynch, 2005; Galtung, 1986).

Myint (2017) explored the application of PJ model and framing theory while studying the conflict between Buddhist and Muslims of state Rakhine in Myanmar in four newspapers including the 2 locals, and US, Bangladeshi newspaper. He found that the war journalism frames dominated the media coverage, irrespective of the media origin. Thus calls on to international and national media outlets to re-evaluate the reporting patterns to play constructive role in de-escalation of the conflict.

Zaheer (2016) studied the coverage of four leading dailies, two English and two Urdu newspapers in aftermath the assassination of Burhan Wani in Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir to explore war and peace framing, and found war frames dominating the media coverage. She further identified the lack of detachment and objectivity, which is essential to the ideology of Peace Journalism.

Iqbal & Hussain (2015) studied the role of media in Pakistan in the backdrop of conflict and peace journalism in leading TV channels, Dunya TV and Geo TV to determine the role as conflict escalator or de-escalator and found that peace frames were dominating in the coverage of Baluchistan sectarian conflict, whereas war frames were dominating in the coverage of ethno political conflict. It is assumed that the media in Pakistan adopts de-escalatory styles when the threat to national interest is low and escalatory style when the threat is high.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Seow and Maslog (2005) posits that war/peace journalism is theoretically supported by framing theory. Although the use of media framing has been prevailing for centuries and scholarly literature of framing is also vast, but there is no concrete definition of framing exists. The two most cited definitions of farming are offered by Gitlin and Entman. Gitlin (1980) asserts the practices and routines of journalism in his definition: “*Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual*” (p. 7, original emphasis). While Entman (1993) describes frames as the selection of certain aspects of reality “to make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). Tankard et al. (1990) defines framing as “a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration.” (Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991). So framing, is used by journalists as a tool to explain content of news and the possible effect of that content to sway public opinion regarding an issue. Since the media’s portrayal of issues influence public opinion, so framing is particularly important in conflict situations. Framing has been used in journalism scholarship as a framework in the coverage of wars as well as domestic conflicts. Framing theory has also replaced Agenda setting theory in recent times in terms of most employed theory in communication research.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To examine the extent of coverage given to the sectarian conflict in elite English daily newspapers of Pakistan.
2. To identify the key indicators of war/peace framing in the coverage of sectarian conflict in elite English daily newspapers of Pakistan.

### **Hypothesis**

**H.1:** It is more likely that the amount of coverage given to the conflict varies significantly in Dawn and The News.

**H.2** It is more likely that the framing of Dawn and The News will differ significantly in their use of war frames and peace frames.

### Method

Content analysis is a methodology used to analyze text, and drive meanings as per the context. (Krippendorf, 1982). Thus, the present study implied the research methodology of content analysis to explore the frames in data as implied in the previous studies (Rawan & Hussain ,2017; Myint,2017; Shah ,2019; Siraj,2014).

The study examined the coverage of sectarian conflict from January 2019 to January 2021 in Pakistani leading English newspapers, Dawn and The News. The two newspapers were selected on the basis of their circulation, influential nature and intellectual readership (Zaheer, 2016). It is based on Galtung's Peace Journalism model (1986, 1989 as cited in Siraj, 2014). The study explored the Peace and war frames in news stories published during the given time period.

### Coding scheme

Peace and war frame categories were taken from Galtung's (1985) classification and further selected after pilot study; as per the need of present study. On the basis of the presence of dominant indicators the story was coded either as peace or war journalism. The study identified each paragraph as coding unit and entire story as contextual unit. This study followed Lee and Maslog (2005) indicators of war and peace frames and (Siraj, 2014) for coding criteria and data analysis.

#### War Journalism Indicators

#### Peace Journalism Indicators

War Journalism Indicators	Peace Journalism Indicators
Visible effects of war	Invisible effects of war
Elite oriented	People oriented
Difference Oriented	Solution Oriented
Here and now	Causes and consequences
Dichotomizes of good and bad guys	Avoid labeling of good and bad guys
Two party orientation	Multi party orientation
Uses of demonizing language	Avoid demonizing language

The war journalism index ranged from 0 to 7, with a mean of 3.63 and a standard deviation of 1.727. The peace journalism index ranged from 0 to 7, with a mean of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 1.805. Intra- and inter-coder reliability tests were conducted with 6 stories (10 percent) of the total sample. The intra-coder reliability test using Holsti's coefficient yielded 100 percent agreement.

### Results

#### Table 1

*Difference in amount of Coverage given by Dawn and The News*

Newspapers	Sectarian Conflict News Stories	
	Number of Stories	Percentage
Dawn	38	63.3
The News	22	36.7
Total	60	100.0

*Note.* The final sample is comprised of 60 stories, with 38 (63.3 percent) being from the Dawn News and 22 (36.7 percent) being from The News.

**Table 2**

*Year of Published News Story*

Year of Published News Story	Number of Stories	Percentage
2019	32	53.3
2020	11	18.3
2021	17	28.3
Total	60	100.0

*Note.* The highest number of news stories on sectarian violence have been published in year 2019 and 2021.

**Table 3**

*War Journalism Indicators*

	N	%
Visible effects of war	7	11.7
Elite oriented	13	21.7
Difference Oriented	4	6.7
Here and now	14	23.3
Dichotomizes of good and bad guys	8	13.3
Two party orientation	4	6.7
Uses of demonizing language	10	16.7
Total	60	100

*Note.* War journalism frame indicators reflect the coverage dominated by “here and now” with a frequency count of 23.3 percent, “Elite Oriented with 21.7 “use of demonizing language” with 16.7 “dichotomies of good and bad guys” with 13.3 percent.

**Table 4**

*Peace Journalism Indicators*

	N	%
Invisible effects of war	9	15.0

People oriented	19	31.7
Solution Oriented	14	23.3
Causes and Consequences	7	11.7
Avoid labeling of good and bad guys	2	3.3
Multi party orientation	3	5.0
Avoid demonizing language	6	10.0
Total	60	100

Note. Peace Journalism Frame Indicators reflected that the coverage was dominated by the indicators of “People oriented” with a frequency count of 31.7, Solution oriented by 23.3, Invisible effects of war” by 15.0 and “causes and consequences” by 11.7 percent.

**Table 5**

*Sectarian violence news story \* war and peace frames Cross tabulation*

	War journalism N (%)	Peace journalism N (%)	Total frames
Sectarian violence news story	24(63.2%)	14(36.8%)	38(100.0%)
Dawn			
The News	12 (54.5%) 60	10(45.5%)	22(100.0%)

Note. A Chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the frequency of War and Peace Frames in Dawn and The News. The results of the Chi-square test showed that there was no significant association between war and peace frames of two newspapers  $X^2 (1, N = 60) = .431 p = .512$ .

**Discussion**

The coverage of Sectarian conflict in Dawn and The News from February 2019 to January 2021 was measured as per the Galtung’s model and classification of peace and war journalism (1986). The overall coverage in both of the dailies remained dominated by war journalism than the peace journalism. This result is in line with the previous studies on the model of war and peace journalism, such as (Hussain, Siraj, & Mahmood, 2019; Myint, 2017; Zaheer, 2016; Siraj, 2014). Thus highlight the argument that press prefers to cover tensions, conflicts in escalatory style than the de-escalatory fashion.

The frame of war journalism was dominated by indicators “here and now” with a frequency count of 23.3 percent, “Elite Oriented with 21.7 “use of demonizing language” with 16.6 “dichotomies of good and bad guys” with 13.3 percent. And Peace journalism frame was dominated by the indicators of “People oriented” with a frequency count of 31.7,

Solution oriented by 23.3, Invisible effects of war” by 15.0 and “causes and consequences” by 11.7 percent.

Most of the stories with war journalism frame focused on elites’ contribution, sufferings, efforts in the process of reconciliation, by focusing on the apparent conditions and preferred to present dichotomies by the use of demonizing language. Whereas Peace Journalism was implied by highlighting the sufferings of the common people, by establishing the background of the issue, and highlighting the solutions.

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