



## Reporting on Electronic Media in Pakistan and Ethical Standards in Journalism

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**Abstract:** Freedom of mass media is taken imperative for self-ruled and self-governed states due to its responsibility of informing and keeping an eye on each nock and corner of the society; however, more freedom asks for more responsibly in return. Resultantly, media ethics serve as an essential guideline and crucial manuscript for respective practitioners to self-control their attitudes and behaviours. The rise and rise of more liberalized media policy in 2002 were a milestone in the history of Pakistan; resultantly, after its media in Pakistan has got more freedom and nuisance recently. In this Research, we interpreted the journalistic principles, such as treatment, neutrality, and impartiality, practiced by the private television media in Pakistan. We wrap up that many pinholes are ongoing in actual media practices as compared to an ethical framework. Our findings recount that the naive private TV news channels are short of some basic expert ethics of journalism and need to perk up and get along them according to given cannons to validate their autonomy and sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Journalism, Media ethics, Journalistic principles, Survey study

### I. INTRODUCTION:

In modern contemporary states, mass media is credited as the fourth pillar; mass media freedom is a compulsory phenomenon to advance and prosper a democratic state. It is an open secret that such media organizations guide the public while paving and craving ways and means for a society's socio-economic development and progress by disseminating and communicating positive imagery and mannerism among the masses. Mass media influences and interferes with every cycle and circle of ordinary and everyday life. People hold and trust the media as potential and ultimate data providers. Formulating the role of media makes it a rich source of change. In the era and age of ever-increasing and ever-increasing global crisis, socio-economic and socio-cultural collapse, global fear and global terror, fundamentalism/extremism, and the clash of civilizations besides climate change, poverty, and disease, there is an even urgent and adequate need and requirement to call/wait for a super journalistic script to be produced.

In Pakistan, immediately after the promulgation of PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority) and the inculcation of a liberalized policy by the government in 2002, private media witnessed a mushroom growth, and now more than ninety-one private national and regional channels operate/perform their work across the country; hence, in this vivid setting of the ultimate competitive situation in newly emerging naive free media, journalists Similarly, the rise of breaking news culture shattered the comfort zone of ed reporters and forced them to produce news without proper verification and authentication, creating significant and severe ethical problems in contemporary/modern media (Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary).

### Objectives of Research

The aim and main objectives of research includes, to highlight the reasons and causes of unethical reporting. And to find the news channels, have their code of ethics, find out more about the way's reporters perform their duties professionally, and dig out the challenges for reporters in professional reporting.

## **Rationale of the Study**

Following the establishment of PEMRA, private media has experienced rapid growth, and now more than 91 private national and regional channels operate in the country; therefore, in this current scenario, journalists face a challenging, demanding situation to deliver news as soon as possible. Also, the rise of breaking news culture has consumed reporters in distributing information without proper verification and authentication; this practice raises significant ethical journalism concerns.

On April 19, 2014, at 3:29 p.m., Samaa TV aired fake news that a private jet landed at Islamabad airport, carrying Musharaf to Dubai. But this news proved false the next day, and that jet was for a businessman and had nothing to do with Musharaf. Three channels aired this news, but no channel retracted this news. On February 4, 2016, at 4:28 p.m., Neo TV, Samaa TV, and Dunya News aired the news that Kanwal Nauman, member of the Punjab Assembly, had died, but this news was also fake. No single channel broadcast any apologies and withdrew from this news. These rapid cases raised serious questions about journalistic ethics and their procedures. This culture was also observed during Lahore NA-122 election coverage and by-election, where all channels simultaneously announced different results. During the 2013 and 2018 general elections, media reported results before finishing polling time.

This false reporting is not limited to fake news; simultaneously, we saw the faces of rape victims and dead bodies without adding the blur effect on Television. In Kasur Tragedy, where media reported that more than 284 people are victims of rape, and some of them were shown on media with their faces, and their names were revealed. But, after a police investigation, this number dropped to less than ten. In this competitive environment and the prevalence of breaking news culture, there was an enormous need for investigating ethical issues and their media practice, which ethical concerns and false reporting encouraged the Researcher to pick this subject and find out how this culture eats. Despite numerous codes of ethics and PEMRA legislation, such cases are growing gradually.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review is divided into two sections. The first part is intended to address the basic and essential values and terminologies associated with freedom of expression, and the second part is an attempt to examine the media ethics practiced in Pakistan following the problems that existed

### **2.1 Background**

Strömbäck and Karlsson (2011) reveal that while the role of journalists in news content declined in the first decade of the twenty-first century due to state-of-the-art technology and shifts in media ownership, journalists still play the most prominent and vital role in news content (Barnhurst & Mutz 1997).

Internet ethics is an applied ethic. More specifically, media ethics studies principles that pave the way for journalists to ensure ethical compliance with the various stratum of society (Ward 2011). Media scholars disagree on a widely accepted list of media ethics, despite lengthy media ethics studies. However, some academics have sought to undermine basic ethical principles that can be considered central in journalism (Meyers, 1993; Bertrand, 2000; Plaisance & Skewes, 2003; Khan, 2011).

Bruun (1979) investigated and enumerated fifty-nine codes of ethics and found that three main concerns were professional integrity, fairness, and media preferences. Jones and Unesco (1980) examined and listed fifty principles in another study and found that the most critical issues were objectivity, fairness, and fact. Detenber and Rosenthal (2014) mentioned as primary four journalistic cannons and shields reality, independence, accountability, and minimizing harm.

Christians (2005) argues that ethical standards such as truth-telling and humanism are citizen-ethical rather than professional-ethical because they can provide an international reference framework to analyze local news media practices and formulate moral codes. Discussed freedom from personal bias, unbiased reporting, and a commitment to the truth as necessary journalistic tools that can be applied to all journalists and are much needed in the new digital world (Ross and Cormier 2010)

### **2.2 Journalism ethics in Pakistan**

Hassan (2012) found that the newspaper's coverage of civil society during 2002, the newspapers provided supporting content to civil society during the study period, directing and mentoring its movement towards pluralism and social responsibility, even under General Pervez Musharraf's autocratic regime.

McDowell et al. (2012) appreciated the role of Pakistani media in deciding parliamentary and judicial legitimacy and the illegitimacy of extra-constitutional acts to overthrow the Supreme Court's then military government in 2007. Yousaf (2012) surveyed over a hundred people, both male and female, and found that Pakistan's private media provides Pakistani society with commendable services in its political socialization and generates much political awareness.

Sabir (2011) Narrated that Pakistani media played an immensely inspiring role in fostering nationalism by responding to national security and military propaganda. Amid these acknowledgments, several studies have focused on critical areas such as the growth of entrepreneurship (Ali et al. 2012), cultural diversity (Rasul & Proffitt 2013), corruption (Abid & Shah 2011), and ethnic minority social issues (Ambreen 2014), mostly ignored by the media. Still vital and essential for a growing and multi-cultural country like Pakistan.

Syed (2008) focused on ethnicity, race, and religion, as reflected in two popular newspapers; his findings show that print media overwhelmingly emphasized Pakistan's Islamic identity. (Ali 2010; Ambreen 2014) and Ahmed et al., 2014. Together findings from these studies showed that newspapers favorably covered divisive minority issues but largely overlooked minority social issues. Abid and Shah (2011) Their results indicate that newspapers focused mainly on financial-capital-related public-sector corruption and neglected private-sector and intellectual corruption almost entirely.

Raza et al. (2012) Suggest examples of a popular TV news channel that gave surprising news that Mr. Nawaz Sharif comes with his boarding pass and goes to the plane. Likewise, during a marriage ceremony, Mr. Chief Justice of Pakistan got live coverage.

Rasul and Proffitt (2013) believe that the proliferation of TV channels, radio stations, and newspapers run by the same media groups failed and remained unsuccessful in fostering content diversity. Mursaleen et al. (2014) worked on more than 300 individuals to assess the quality of service provided by major news channels. They were surprised to see any differences between planned and perceived service quality.

Hassan and Sabir (2011) revealed that the top newspapers presented NGOs in a discriminatory and relatively hostile way. By evaluating Pakistan's leading newspapers for their representation of NGOs. Eijaz et al. (2012) suggest that television news material often portrays and highlights those who are already well-known citizens and lacks the actions of less influential. They also claim that in Pakistan, television media has proven to be a ruling class mouthpiece. Juan Ramón (2012) argues that the most held concept of objectivity meanings is the notion of value-free reality regulated by investigative reporting, without a doubt.

Hackett (1984) invented it as the actual concept of objectivity. He suggests that facts can be separated from judgments of opinion or value. Hassan and Sabir (2011) exemplified the courage to narrate how divisive media portrayed NGOs. They argued that critical reporting was not undertaken to frame the NGOs' picture. Raza et al. (2012) Postulated that news content reporting activities were not as fair and transparent as intended and needed to be. In other studies found that working journalists are increasing media ownership as one of the essential factors in journalistic practices in Pakistan; other factors, such as government and community pressure and intense rivalry among influential media organizations, are also likely to claim and have a significant effect (Pintak and Nazir, 2013).

Dickinson and Memon (2012) argue that government and military influence and impact are noteworthy and can be listed in Pakistani media and government advertising revenue as an estimated 30 percent of all print media advertising revenue in 2007 (Press Reference, 2007). Khan (2011) further adds to this notion and argues that, in Pakistani media, professionalism is a self-deceptive concept than a reality.

Pervez Khan, a professor of journalism at the University of Technology in Kohat, was willing to suggest that one of the problems facing the Pakistani media is that we are underprovided with qualified and professional journalists (personal contact, 2011). Corruption at the level of individual journalists is widespread and very common, particularly in the rural and far-flung press, and has done a lot to defame journalism and lower and demolish the press poise of the public (Sumbal, 2011).

It is an essential and fundamental fact that ethical practices become different with different corporate, cultural, social, and institutional traditions; this is the extreme and intensely competitive climate for exclusive stories, because if one doesn't publish another one will make it his complete within minutes, so

media practitioners are always searching for exclusive news. (Communication and Media Newspaper, 2013).

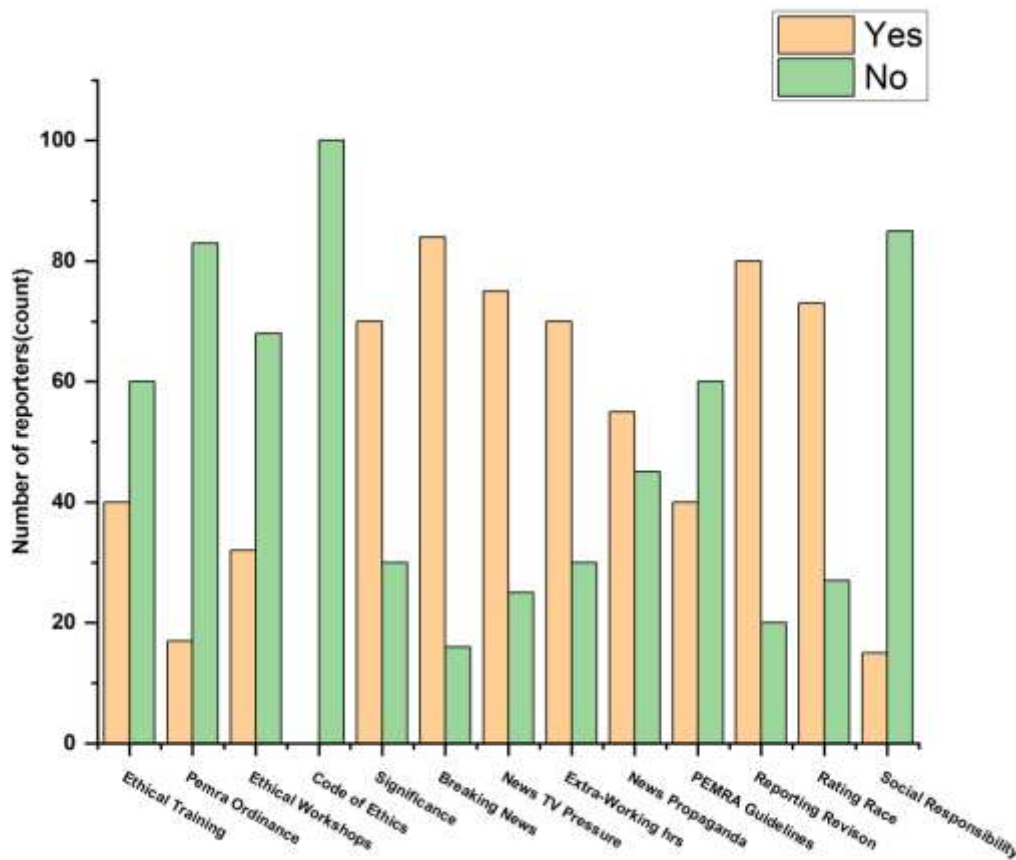
### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research work is intended to explore the situation of Electronic Media Reporting in Pakistan, reference to the ethical standards of journalism. This survey research method was adopted to collect the response from respondents. The written Questionnaire was the instrument of this research work. The number of respondents from whom the survey was conducted was 100 respondents. The taster represents the whole population, and there is the rule of the sampling that sampling must not be so far-reaching that the canvasser may not be competent to handle and not so petite that unable to represent the whole population. The population is defined as the universe of events from which the sample is drawn out (Reinard, 2007). And for this work, 100 respondents' sample was ample all were professional TV Reporters. For this research work, a Non-Random Sampling design was adopted, and a Purposive sampling technique was applied. The Researcher distributed 50 questionnaires in Lahore as it is the capital for many TV Networks, and 25 each in Faisalabad and Rawalpindi.

Respondents were practiced and certified reporters from renowned news media channels; all were from Punjab province, most populated, metropolitan, and developed cities Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Faisalabad, i.e., Ajj News TV. ATV, Dawn News, Dunya News Network, Koh-e-Noor Television, Kook TV, KTN News, Saama TV, GNN TV, TV One Air Waves media, and Waqt News TV from Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi. These are the news channels which have their sub-offices in almost all over Pakistan.

#### Data Analysis and Presentation

**Figure.1: Below graph representing the "Yes" and "No" response to different questions from the Questionnaire.**



The 40 percent (40) respondents respond in Yes, meaning they have a proper journalism training while reporting their professional career. In comparison, the other 60 percent (60) responded in No, meaning

they have no exposure to any proper journalism training while they are in their professional career. Further includes the reporter's knowledge of PEMRA 2002 Ordinance. 83% (83) respondents reported no PEMRA 2002, while 17% (17) respondents were sufficiently familiar with PEMRA 2002. The 32% (32) respondents reported that their channels arranged workshops on ethical standards of journalism for them. In comparison, 68% (68) respondents said that their tracks were not there to conduct workshops on ethical standards of journalism for reporters.

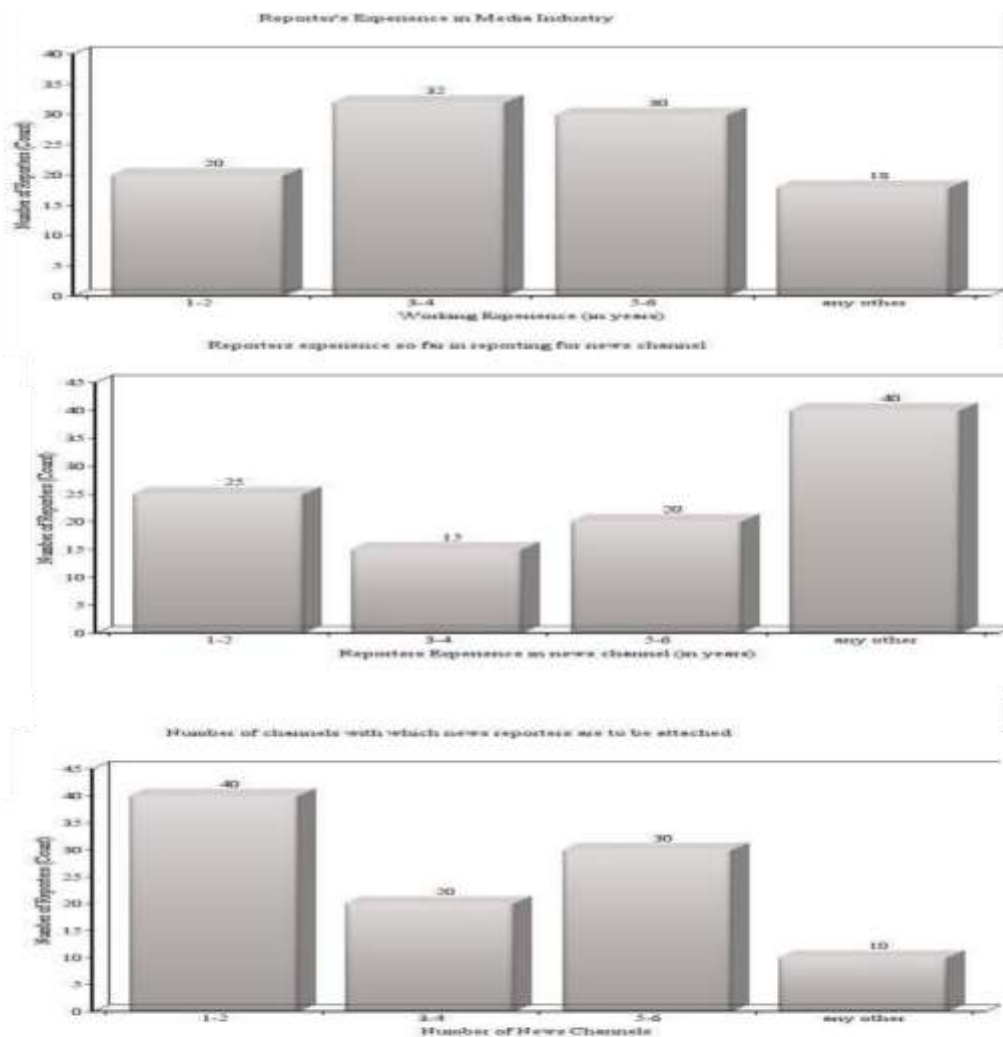
The different code of Ethics is integrated with the channels. 100% (100) respondents said their channel does not have a separate written code of ethics other than the PEMRA Ordinance. So, 70 percent (70) respondents believe that the code of ethics is the obstacle to objectively reporting, while the other 30 percent (30) respondents have a different view, which is the code of ethics. 84% (84) respondents say that one cannot correctly follow the code of ethics in the race for breaking news with other news channels. In comparison, the additional 16% (16) says that the race for breaking news with other news channels has never affected the quality of reporting. 75% (75) respondents said yes, we pressured the channel to report the specific number of news in a day, while the other 25% (25) respondents said no.

The 12 percent (12) respondents respond in the 1-5 category, meaning they spend 1-5 hours on the field one day. In category 6-10, 70% (70) respondents answer, which means they spend 6-10 hours a day in the area. 10% (10) respondents respond in category 11-15, which implies they spend 11-15 hours a day in the field, while another 8% (8) respondents are in any other type. The 70 percent (70) respondents said that additional working hours affect the ability of reporters to correctly report news, while the other 30 percent (30) respondents responded opposite.

The 55 percent (55) respondents said yes, the news is used for propaganda on news channels. In comparison, the other 45 percent (45) respondents said no propaganda use of info on news channels is not available. The 40 percent (40) respondents said yes, the PEMRA Code of Conduct guidelines on reporting terrorist incidents are only in Pakistan's current situation. In comparison, another 60 percent (60) said no, the PEMRA Code of Conduct guidelines are not only appropriate in Pakistan's current situation, but also others. The 80 percent (80) respondents believe that the revision of existing regulations on the Code of Conduct for Reporting is appropriate.

In comparison, the remaining 20 percent (20) respondents believe that the new Code of Conduct for Reporting in Pakistan is adequate. Seventy-three percent (73) of respondents are convinced that the competition for a ranking between news outlets affects the quality of reporting. In comparison, 27 percent (27) of respondents agree that this rivalry is rational for the quality of reporting. The 15 percent (15) respondents said news channels are effectively playing their position of social responsibility while other 85 percent (85) criticize the work of news channels in social responsibility.

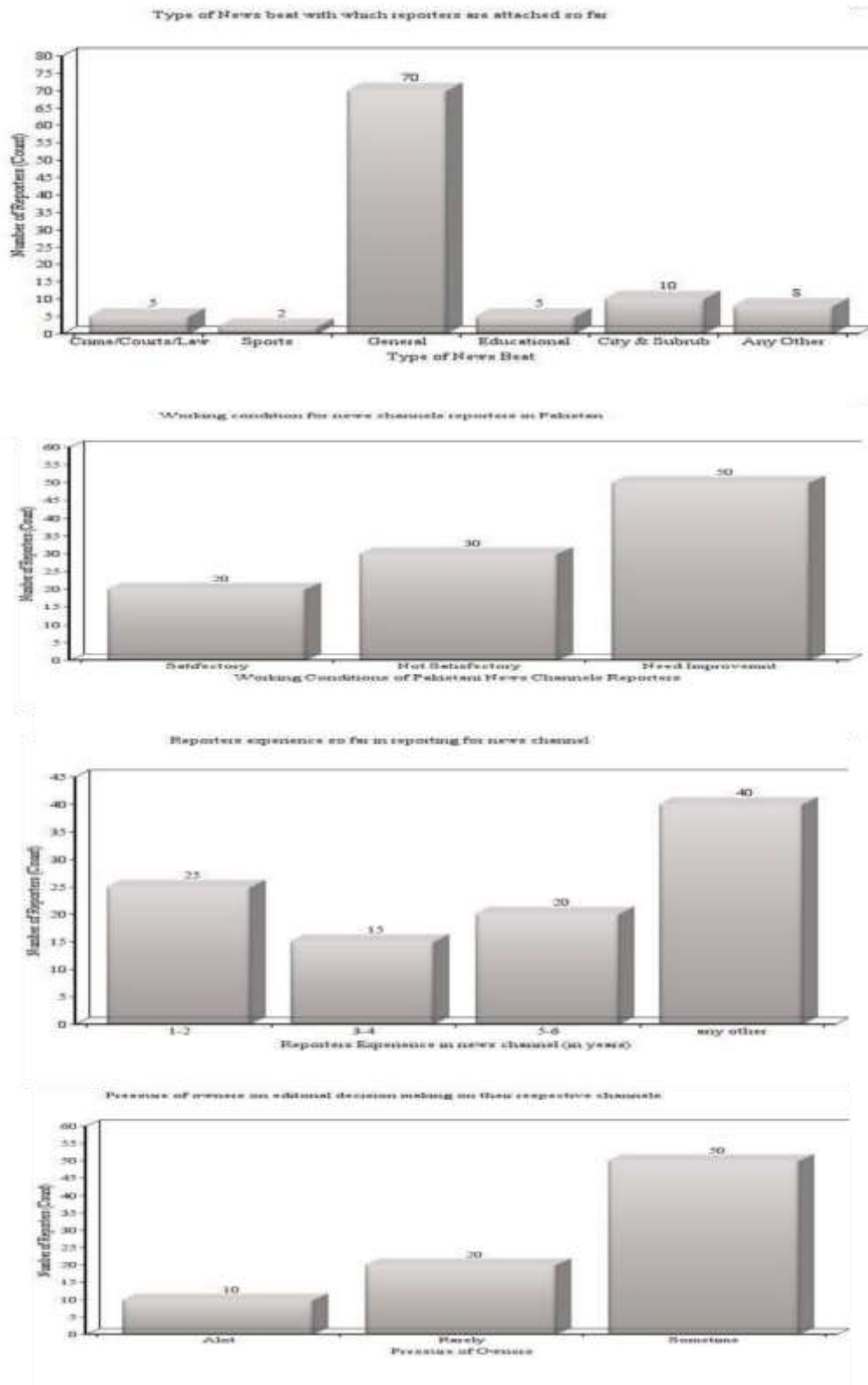
In figure 2, 20% (20) reporters categorize 1-2 years of sharing experience, while 32% (32) reporters have 3-4 years of experience. Thirty percent (30) of respondents fell into the 5-6-year experience range, and 18 respondents were in every other group. In the sharing experience of 1-2 years, 25 percent (25) respondents are classified. There are 15 percent (15) participants who have 3-4 years of experience. Twenty percent (20) of respondents have 5-6 years of experience, and 40 percent (40) of respondents have the status of every other respondent in the scale. The respondents of 40 percent (40) were part of 1-2 outlets. 20% (20) of respondents spent time on 3 to 4 channels. Thirty percent (30) of respondents have 3-4 channel experience, while ten percent (10) of respondents fall into some other group.



**Figure.2: Above figure indicating the overall work experience, current channel experience, and the number of news channels.**

Figure 3 representing the 5% (5) respondents have worked in Crime/Courts/ Law beat. 2% (2) reporters have experience in Sports beat. 70% (70) respondents have part of General Beat. 5% (5) reporters have attached with Educational beat. 10% of respondents worked in City and Subway beat while 8 % (8) respondents are categorizing in any other. The 20 % (20) respondents are there in the category of Satisfactory, Other 30 % (30) are not satisfied, which means working conditions for news channel reporters in Pakistan are not satisfactory, and the remaining 50% (50) are in favour of improvement which means operating conditions for news channels reporters in Pakistan must improve in a proper way

The 45 % (45) respondents nominate the Ownership, 15 % (15) Respondents in favour of Advertising, 20 % (20) respondents vote for Sourcing while 10% 10% respondents were there to nominate the Flack/ Pressure groups, and anti-ideology for effecting factors on the credibility or objectivity of news on news channels. Almost 10 % (10) respondents choose A lot, 20 % (20) rarely said, while 50 % (50) believe in sometimes, which means, in some cases, owners of the news channels affect the editorial decisions of their respective channels.



**Figure.3: This figure representing the reporter's response to the question's types of news beat, working condition of reporters and owner pressure.**

#### IV. DISCUSSION:

It was discovered in response to the survey that there are only 40 percent reporters who have been trained in media ethics; this indicates that there is a wide gap in our reporting amongst professionally ethically qualified workers. A significant and noteworthy incident reveals that a private TV aired/broadcast fabricated and fake news that a private jet landed at Islamabad airport on April 19, 2014, at 03:29 p.m. will pick up Mr. Musharaf to Dubai. But this news was proven wrong the next day, and the jet was simply meant for a businessman and had nothing to do with Mr. Musharaf. Leading three channels transmitted this news, but no channel retracted this news or released any apologies.

According to my findings, only 17 percent of reporters are subject to the PEMRA ordinance. That is also a grey field of PEMRA and our news. Just 32 percent of reporters have completed several seminars on proper training and how ethically to publish. That is also a significant reason why reporters are unaware of covering events like elections where all channels offer news in a competitive sphere climate.

In keeping with the above background, this tradition was also observed during the election coverage and by-election of Lahore NA-122 in which all channels announced entirely different results at the same time and the open secret is that during the general elections of 2013 and 2018, media published results before the end of the polling period. Technically speaking, this procedure is not practical since the polling ends with the polling workers beginning to count the votes, then extracting them wisely from the party and then extracting the rejected ballots. Therefore, it will take at least half to complete an hour all this time. It was a clear example and a parable on behalf of media organizations of non-ethical and non-professional conduct. A significant example in this regard is the Kasur debacle, in which the media claimed that more than 284 people are rape. Still, this figure fell dramatically to less than ten after a police investigation.

According to our findings, there is no single channel with its own independent ethics code, such as BBC and CNN. That is a very worrying circumstance if the channel does not have the basis for ethically covering incidents so that reporters will pursue them. There is a great need for any news organization's ethical code of ethics.

Unfortunately, most reporters feel that the code of ethics is a challenge in reporting; 70 percent of reporters consider their professional reporting challenge. Just 30 percent of reporters think their professional practices are not an obstacle. According to 84 percent of respondents, breaking news culture is also a significant factor for false and unverified news reports. Just 16 percent of reporters think that in this dynamic climate, news can be broken out with verification.

On February 4, 2016, at 4:28 p.m., most of the leading TV channels aired the news that Kanwal Nauman, a member of the Punjab Assembly, had died, but this news was also wrong. Still, no single channel broadcast any apology for this news on the very next day. Such cases have raised fundamental concerns about media ethics and their policies when happening rapidly. Another factor behind the fake news reports is that 75 percent of reporters believe their outlets are forcing them to cover news on particular issues; since there is a shortage of reporters in Punjab, they work more than ten hours a day. In this situation, they often report a rushed news story, affecting their productivity.

Near the middle number of reporters think the news is being used in Pakistan for propaganda. Fifty-five percent of respondents said propaganda is used in media news while maintaining that news is not being used for propaganda in Pakistan. Discussing how news media manipulate propaganda news stories is essential here. Channel also used the knowledge for its purposes.

According to 45% of respondent owners of the company, the objectivity of news story affects their financial interests. Just 15 percent of respondents believe advertising can also influence the objectivity of news articles. And only 20% think that sometimes news source manipulates news according to his interest. Agency provides the information with whatever advantage it protects the obligation to review 2nd or 3rd source news to ensure the news article's objectivity. Forty percent of respondents say that in the current situation, the PEMRA Code of Ethics needs to be changed and that improvements need to be made to the country we are fighting a war on terrorism. Accordingly, PEMRA should amend its ethics code. In several cases, we observe news outlets showing terrorist statements and reporting TTP news without verification.

The rating race also affects news coverage by 73% of respondents. For the sake of news outlets, strive to exploit details to arouse public curiosity and even make the non-issue an issue. To run the ranking, news organizations need funding to assess prices for their adds. That is where companies prioritize rating. In this scenario, PEMRA should take a measure and abolish rating meters to eliminate this rating culture to



boost news quality. A famous example of this is Qandeel Baloch, where the media played a very unprofessional role and displayed a story related to her personal life that instigated immense hatred towards her and led her to die. That is the big question mark on rating group in Pakistan; here, PEMRA needs to intervene and provide some alternative to a marketing organization to add a score to avoid ranking.

Just 15 percent of respondents believe news media play their social role. That is a big issue about the genuine, responsible part of media in society. Without free, independent media, a community cannot grow. And safeguard their financial ends in Punjab media organizations, placing them behind their social responsibility position. On the cricket match between Pakistan and Zimbabwe some TV channels, news of suicide attacks in Qaddafi Stadium was broadcast, which was a challenging situation for a stadium and outdoor people. Around 30,000 people were in the stadium, and this news could lead to chaos and several deaths.

These results show we need to improve our culture of reporting. Our reporters mostly do not know the ethics code. Code of Ethics is a guideline for all media professionally reporting on events. Here PEMRA can find fake news stories and give the reporters a warning letter, and if they repeat the same acts, they can be penalized. Membership of professional bodies may be removed as punishment. Both TV channels must have PEMRA orders to show their organizations the PEMRA code of ethics, allowing reporters to read it conveniently. Now, if we face this terrible situation, media houses and PEMRA must build an exact code of ethics that will suit all. Suggestions from all professional journalists, employers, and owners should make up this ethics code.

#### V. CONCLUSION:

We analyse the journalism ethics on private television news channels. Our findings reflect disagreements about group plans, planning, rush to break the news, content, bias, and objectivity. Similarly, we note that while emphasizing much more superficial things, private media networks ignored far-reaching facets of society. News sources often predispose to contentious rather than unbiased problems. Significant gaps in impartiality and honesty have existed and prevailed. The biggest problem here is preparation lack. Governments, NGOs, and media organizations must organize and coordinate exceptional regular seminars to give media practitioners more insight into ethical and moral values.

As our response suggests that there is no individual media ethics in Pakistan that is essential to democracy and capable of upholding freedom of expression, we recommend adopting an exact code of ethics for media organizations. This code provides detailed guidance on news content management, bias, and impartiality as well as eminence news reporting. In line with the background mentioned above, media regulators should aim to promote the entry of new media companies into the existing industry to foster healthy competition and put an end to the monopoly rivalry between few significant media houses that are often willing to become a cartel.

The need to improve media expertise highlights the immense need for journalism capacity-building in terms of technical competence. In this sense, undergraduate and graduate schools should provide and incorporate special media ethics courses. Media organizations, on the other hand, should provide educational programs and technical methods to teach journalists about their roles and media ethics. This strategy would discourage the useless from breaking news sprint as the road to TRP and revenue generation at the expense of brutal media slaughter and social ethics. Besides retired or working judges, administrators, sociologists, psychologists, educators, religious scholars, and other branches of civil society, media professionals and board members will establish a new legislative body. This body does have regulatory authority and suspending or even cancelling any media practitioner's license for the time being or, in the event of continuing unethical behaviour, maybe relevant enough. This body would be an hour-needed watchdog.

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