



Treason of Expression: An Alarming Trend in Freedom of Expression

Tasaddaq Hussain, Assistant Professor, School of Mass Communication, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan, Email: drtasaddaq.mcomm@mul.edu.pk

Faisal Irfan, School of Languages, Civilization and Philosophy (SLCP), University Utara Malaysia, Email: faisal.irfn@gmail.com

Shahid Minhas, Assistant Professor of Mass Communication, Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak, Pakistan

Muhammad Anwar, Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, Gift University Gujranwala, Pakistan

Abdul Ghani, Assistant Professor, School of Mass Communication, Minhaj University Lahore Pakistan

Abstract- Freedom of expression (FOE) is claimed as a basic human right but there is no single line, separating it from blasphemy, which could be equally acceptable to all. When FOE crosses the boundary and enters into the domain of blasphemy, the Muslim World condemns it; whereas, at the same time Western World supports it, declaring it a symbol of democracy. No doubt, Islam is a powerful supporter of freedom of expression but with some limitations. This paper is an attempt to discuss, to what extent the FOE is acceptable to the entire population of the world and where does it cause a conflict? Its main objective is to point out the "root of evil" which shatters the global peace; and to discover a formula which could be used to solve this problem. Methodologically, qualitative research technique is used; descriptive approach is adopted. Principal books, scholarly articles, and academic writings are especially consulted. It is concluded that all other basic human rights having limits; are unanimously accepted; therefore, FOE must also be redefined to make it acceptable to the whole world. In this way, an alarming trend of treason of expression is alienated from the glorified concept of the freedom of expression and a conflict reporting model of communication is developed.

Key Words: Treason of Expression, Freedom of Expression, Blasphemy, conflict reporting model and respect of religion

I. INTRODUCTION

Every sensible individual of the world likes to have a peaceful life; even though, we see the world is not in a position of harmony and prosperity. In different areas of the world people are in a severe conflicting position with each other, even the global level unrest is increasing with the passage of time. A huge debate on freedom of expression with reference to the freedom and respect of religion, hate speech, defamation and blasphemy has confused the masses. Moreover, advancement in global media has changed the scenario and the world has reached to a very sensitive point of time. This situation is demanding a transparent analysis of the conflict. This paper is an attempt to discuss the freedom of expression, blasphemy, defamation and hate speech with reference to the democratic values and prevailing laws.

Background of the Study

The late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen several major incidents of the Muslim world taking offence at pictorial or written representation of the prophet Muhammad peace be upon him (PBUH) and his teachings (Marquez, 2012). In practice people have been brought to trial, killed or had a fatwa called on them for a wide range of acts that have been cited as blasphemous, including depicting prophet of Islam either in writing or in some other manner that was perceived as insulting (Mackey & Stack, 2012). On July 1, 2012, two versions of 14-minute videos, of derogatory film trailer *Innocence of Muslims* (IOM) were posted to YouTube by "Sam Bacile"; however, by September film was drawn to the attention of the Arabic speaking world by blogger Morris Sadek (Zahos, 2012; Lovett, 2012; Murphy, 2012; Fenton, 2012). The film was supported and promoted by Pastor Terry Jones, known for a Qur'an-burning controversy, which also led to riots around the world. Jones said that he planned to show a 13-minute trailer at his church, the Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Florida, on September 11, 2012. A two-minute excerpt dubbed in Arabic was broadcast on September 9 by Sheikh Khalid Abdullah on An-Naas, an Egyptian television station (Lovett, 2012). On the same day first protest against derogatory film trailer was demonstrated in Egypt and just after that a wave of protests blew which engulfed the globe till the end of month (Mackey & Stack, 2012). Similarly, a protest in Benghazi was observed in which US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens along with three other Americans was killed. The Americans said; it was a mature

pre plan; it was not stimulated by the derogatory film (CNN,2012a). Al-Qaeda accepted the responsibility and said it was in revenge for a U.S.drone strike which killed an al-Qaeda leader Abu Yahya Al-Libi (Michal, 2012;Kirkpatrick, 2012). In Egypt, a similar protest was organized (San Francisco Chronicle,2012). Next day, on September 12, YouTube announced that it had "temporarilyrestricted access" to the video in Egypt and Libya (Associated Press, 2012). In Afghanistan,the Taliban fighters attacked the British military base Camp Bastion insouthern Helmand province, killing two American soldiers however, all the insurgentswere killed (BBC News, 2012c, BBC News, 2012d). Haji Ghulam Ahmed Billor,Federal Minister of Pakistan, announced a bounty of \$100,000 for killingNakoula (BBC News, 2012a; Billor, 2012; Siddiq, 2012).The first protestInnocence of Muslims|| in America was held on September22; the demonstrators gathered in the Islamic Center of America Dearborn and condemnednot only the derogatory film but also the extreme response in the Muslimworld (azcentral.com, 2012). In Dortmund, Germany, on the same day, about oneand half thousand people held demonstrations (Khaleej Times, 2012). The Frenchgovernment banned a planned protest that was due to be held on September 22 in theGrand Mosque of Paris||. Violators of the ban shall spend six months of imprisonmentand fined seven hundred Euros (Turkish weekly, 2012). Similarly, in Kano, amain city of Nigeria, "tens of thousands" of demonstrators staged a rally which wasbeing led by the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (BBC News, 2012b). In Toronto,Canada, about one thousand and five hundred people held demonstrations outside theU.S. Consulate (CTVnews, 2012). In Los Angeles, US federal authorities arrestedNikola, on September 27, 2012 (Victoria, 2012; Press TV, 2012b). In Canton ofDearborn, USA, the last rally of the long chain of the protests, against the derogatoryfilm, Innocence of Muslims|| was organized on September 29 (Detroit Free Press, 2012).In this storming protest of 20-days, activists were demanding to arrest andpunish the writer/producer of derogatory film and smash the video from You-Tubewebsite. This furious protest led to hundreds of injuries and over fifty deaths (CNN,2012b). However, after detention of NikoulaBacilein Los Angeles, hurricane of theprotests stopped (Riesling, 2012).

Clash in freedom of expression and respectof religion is not a new phenomenon;however, after 9/11 it has emerged as a major conflict of the world. Different statesand organizations have tried to address the issue, but situation is not very favorabletoday. In this study, it is tried to draw a line of demarcation between blasphemy and freedom of expression.

Blasphemy

An absolute definition of blasphemy is a difficult task due to its dependency on thevalues prevalent in different societies. Generally, it refers to the denigrating and insulting expressions targeted toward God and other aspects of religion. In short it is an act of insult or aggression against any religion or its sacred rudiments. For example, the holy God, the holy Prophets or their companions, the holy books and the holy sites etc. However, some scholars have pointed out another aspect of blasphemy that it is a noose around the neck of speakers which can be pulled by anyone if the speaker belongs to the unpopular side (Neu, Sticks, & Stones, 2009; Raouf, 2015).It is a soft criticism on misuse of the rules and regulations regarding the blasphemy. In fact, blasphemy is a teasing, derogatory and hateful deed against a religion or any sacred belief. Philosophicaland reasonable discussion or even a criticism in soft, sober, respectful and logical way, on aproper forum, does not fall in the domain blasphemy (Qur'an 16:125). It can be termed as a realexample of the freedom of expression and it has never been disapproved, dialogue in a polite manner is divinely supported way of communication (Qur'an 2:83).

George (2013) discussing the ethical responsibilities of journalists, argued that news media professionals can draw on legal discourse from forums such as the European Court of Human Rights for a rich and nuanced explication of key ethical principles at stake and how to resolve conflicts among them. He supported the notion that an ethical approach should assert freedom of expression as a key pillar of democracy, but should also respect religious beliefs and historically marginalized minorities, in keeping with the democratic principle of equality. Ethics of 20th century do not seem to have prepared Journalists adequately for 21st century challenges concerning religious identity and abusive speech in a context of global interconnectivity. Supporting the notion of Kelly McBride, George suggests that editors should think carefully about the harm they could cause by amplifying a small event like —Burning the Quran, it was an act designed to fuel the discord between Muslims and Christians (McBride, 2010). Furthermore, he supported that journalists and bloggers must explore choices that could minimize harm, besides their duty to document universally offensive points of view. Winding up the discussion, George admitted that to eliminate the problem of intolerance, responsibility does not lie only at the door of the media; however, it can make a difference (George C., 2013).

In 2013, James Moore, Associate Professor Department of Social Studies Education, Cleveland State University Ohio, USA, admitted that there has been an increase in the past decade, in the passage of hate speech codes, blasphemy laws, and the laws of the defamation of religions. He noted while analyzing the situation that these laws, apparently passed to protect believers of different faiths and minority group members from offensive speech or criticism based on natural characteristics, are actually a direct threat to the ideals of freedom of expression and religion. Moore opined that the promoters of democracy must use their freedom of expression to oppose blasphemy laws and speech codes that are objectionable to individual freedoms, human rights, and limited government (Moore, 2013). Referring Marshall and Shea, Moore noted that blasphemy laws and speech codes are often justified by advocates as necessary to combat religious, ethnic, and racial hatred and preventing all forms of violence and discrimination against religious, racial, and ethnic minority groups. He pointed out that such a language makes the laws pleasant for many people,

but the results are always the same a restriction on human liberty to freely think and express opinions|| (Marshall & Shea, 2011). In further discussion they mentioned that in Europe, 36 countries (80% of the region's 45 nations) have such laws that penalize defamation of any religion and almost half of the world's countries (47%) have laws or policies that punish apostasy (abandonment of one's religion), blasphemy, or defamation (religious hate speech) (Pew Forum, 2012).

Freedom of Expression (FOE)

Freedom of expression is considered as a basic human right, so it is guaranteed in International law as well as regional human rights treaties and it is widely guaranteed in many of the world's constitutions|| (Thorgeirdottir, 2006, p. 7). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states in its article 19 that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR], 1948). Freedom of expression as a right has been protected in majority, by the constitutions and human rights organizations of the world. Freedom of expression has a long history in both the Western and Muslim worlds. Each one has viewed, defined, and analyzed this term differently; according to their values and principles. Unsurprisingly, the Western and Muslim worlds do not completely agree on the meaning of freedom of expression, though they do share an agreement on some aspects of freedom of expression. In particular, freedom of expression is to speak, write, act, and believe freely without causing harm to the society or any individual. However, disagreement is on the limitations of freedom of expression (Albudaiwi, 2014). It is generally accepted that no media systems in the world can be acknowledged as constraint free (Iqbal, 2011). Weaver and Buddenbaum point out that nature of control on media varies from country to country and system to system (Weaver & Buddenbaum, 1985). During the Innocence of Muslims Issue, different voices were rising from different corners of the world. However the voice of Ban Ki-moon the Ex Secretary General of the United Nations was very balanced. He admitted that derogatory video clips director saying that he abused his right to freedom of expression, an ample warning for so-called liberals who are unmindful of the definition of an individual's right to speak his mind and where this freedom borders on antagonism (The Nation, 2012; Berkowitz & Eko, 2007; Eko L., 2012).

Redefining the Freedom of Expression. The outstanding rules dealing with freedom of expression in major states of the globe come up with a common concept of FOE. It shows that any argument (positive or negative) about an individual, belief or ideology, is a basic human right. However, it must be a peace and betterment oriented activity. When a freedom of expression results in true threats of violence; it must be restricted (Brandenburg v. Ohio, 1969). In the light of these outlines, it can be concluded that FOE is a unique and prominent human right. It is absolutely God gifted and no one is allowed to abridge it until it is used to harm the humanity (Qur'an 67:2). All the Globins deserve equally to articulate their point of view freely. However, it should be truth, betterment, tolerance and peace oriented activity and must be categorically avoiding the ridicule and insult. A sober, philosophical and positive goal oriented discussion and dialogue is a laudable, symbolic and ideal freedom of expression and its negation is a naked extremism and treason of expression.

II. DISCUSSION

Debate around defamation of religions and its impact on the right to free expression, has been continued as an issue at global level, and in 2006, UNESCO's Executive Board adopted a decision on respect for freedom of expression and respect for sacred beliefs and values and religious and cultural symbols, at its 174th session. Further calls for the strengthening of religious tolerance and the prevention of hate speech were agreed in the adoption at the Human Rights Council of Resolution 16/18 by consensus in 2011 and this was reaffirmed by similar resolutions in 2012 and 2013, as well as the agreement of the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of incitement to hatred in 2013 by 87 governments (Radsch & Pollack, 2014). It shows that serious actions have been taken on the world level to resolve this issue; however, it is not completely eradicated. In my doctoral thesis, I have suggested a conflict reporting model of Communication (CRMC) which is an attempt to explain the freedom of expression with reference to blasphemy. (see Figure 1)

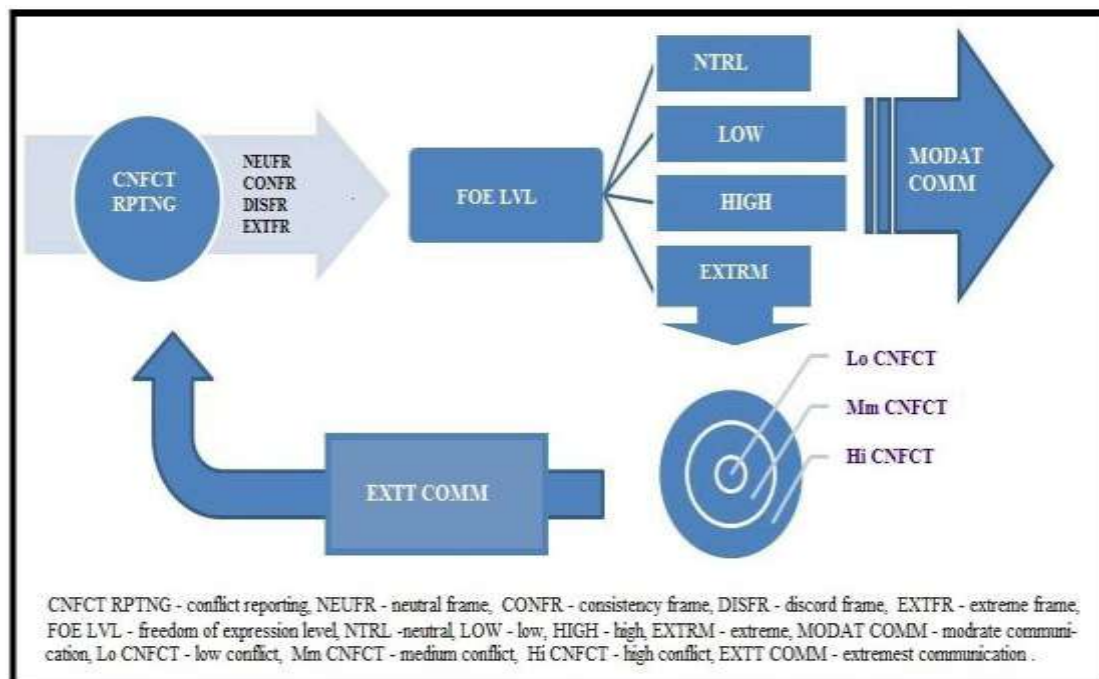


Figure 1 Conflict reporting model of communication.

This model shows that:

Conflict reporting (CNFCT RPTNG) is conducted freely by all media, according to their own establishmentality's environment and reporting is usually conducted through neutral frame (NEUFR), consistency frames (CONFR) and discord frame (DISFR). The extreme frame (EXTFR) is also used, but rarely. Freedom of expression level (FOE LVL) is classified into four categories, with the help of neutral, consistency, discord and extreme frames. When highest score of CONFR and DISFR is 50%, it is labeled as neutral (NTRL) level of the freedom of expression. When highest score of CONFR or DISFR is 51% to 70%, it is labeled as low (LOW) level of the freedom of expression. When highest score of CONFR or DISFR is 71% to 100%, it is labeled as high (HIGH) level of the freedom of expression. When highest score of a DISFR is 100+, it is labeled as extreme (EXTRM) level of the freedom of expression. This score is just like 6-scores of Cricket. (Hate speech frame, Defamation Frame or Blasphemy Frame score is labeled as 100+ %).

Low and high levels of the freedom of expression are termed as moderate communication (MODAT COMM), and this type of reporting is unanimously recognized as a symbol of polite societies. Extreme level of the freedom of expression is termed as extremist communication (EXTT COMM), and this type of reporting is labeled as a symbol of rude societies. Extreme level (EXTRM LVL) of the freedom of expression is further divided into three sub levels; Low, medium, high and Extreme. This Extreme level of freedom of expression plays a very dangerous role and opens new chapters of never lasting conflicts, so it is placed in treason of expression domain.

III. CONCLUSION

It is evident that Freedom of expression is not an absolute concept; it is a relative term just like the terms of rest and motion used in Physics. Different media outlets exercise different levels of freedom of expression, depending upon their respective establishmentities and governmentalities (Eko&Kananovich, 2015; Foucault, 1994). Mostly, media exercise freedom of expression through four main frames: neutral, consistency, discord and extreme frame. In extremely notorious and controversial cases like Danish cartoon controversy and Innocence of Muslims Issue, the transparent concept of the freedom of expression becomes darkened and disputed. This type of freedom has never been appreciated in history; and civilized societies have firm rules of respect (Qur'an 49:1-18). It can be labeled as extreme level of the freedom. These highly controversial cases include defamation; hate speech and blasphemy frame depiction. In all such cases, the extreme framing puts a petro-fuel to the fire of conflict.

We are living in a democratic international system of 21st century. More than 77% of the global population belongs to different religions. Everybody has an extreme of love and respects for his beliefs and does not like to be defamed, mocked or insulted (Pew Research Center, 2016). So it is absolutely unjustified to consider the blasphemy, hate speech or defamation as a normal freedom of expression. It is an odd case. According to the democratic values, the opinion of majority is always respected. So, why this rule is not applicable here? According to the democratic norms, insult of the "dominant opinion" is termed as "treason" which it is the root of all evils and conflicts. So in this situation, sentiments of the majority of the world population are drastically injured. The respect of human values and peace has been devastated and the freedom has taken the shape of treason. It is a line which separates the freedom of expression from the treason of expression.

REFERENCES

1. Albudaiwi, D. (2014, December). *The Impact of Culture and Religion on the Perception of Freedom of Expression Between Older and Younger Generations in South Africa and State of Kuwait: an International and Comparative Study (Doctoral Theses)*, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. Retrieved September 6, 2015, from <https://dc.uwm.edu>
2. Associated Press. (2012, September 12). YouTube blocks video inciting Middle East violence in Egypt and Libya. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved May 3, 2016, from The Washington Post Web site <http://www.washingtonpost.com>
3. azcentral.com. (2012, September 22). *azcentral.com*. Retrieved February 14, 2015, from azcentral Web site <http://azcentral.newspapers.com>
4. Babbie, E. (1995). *The practice of social research* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
5. BBC News. (2012a, September 15). BBC News - Prince Harry at Camp Bastion during Taliban attack. *bbc.co.uk*. Retrieved July 7, 2016, from <http://www.bbc.com>
6. BBC News. (2012b, September 22). Thousands protest over anti-Islam film in Kano Nigeria. *BBC News*. Retrieved February 14, 2015, from <http://www.bbc.com>
7. BBC News. (2012c, September 23). Anti-Islam film: US condemn Pakistan minister's bounty. *BBC News*. Retrieved July 8, 2015, from <http://www.bbc.com>
8. BBC News. (2012d, September 15). Insurgent attack on Camp Bastion, Helmand province. Retrieved July 8, 2015, from <http://www.bbc.com>
9. Berkowitz, D., & Eko, L. (2007). Blasphemy as a Sacred Rite/Right: The Mohammed Cartoons Affair and Maintenance of Journalistic ideology. *Journalism Studies*, 779-797.
10. CNN. (2012a, September 21). Death, destruction in Pakistan amid protests tied to Islam film. Retrieved December 19, 2014, from <http://www.cnn.com>
11. CNN. (2012b, September 12). Pentagon to review video of Libya attack. Retrieved December 19, 2014, from <http://www.cnn.com>
12. CTVnews. (2012, September 22). Thousands protest anti-Muslim film in Toronto. *toronto.ctvnews.ca*. Retrieved September 23, 2015, from <https://www.toronto.ctvnews.ca>
13. Detroit Free Press. (2012, October 21). Protesters march in Canton against anti-Islam film. Retrieved July 3, 2016, from <http://www.freep.com>
14. Eko, L. (2009, May 21). *The Mohammed Cartoons Affair and the New International Right of Respect for Religion*. Retrieved January 10, 2015, from http://www.citation.allacademic.com/meta/p300500_index.html

14. Eko, L. (2012). New Media, Old Regimes: Case Studies in Comparative Communication. *Law and Policy*, 161.
15. Eko, L. S. (2014). *New Media, Old Regimes: Case Studies in Comparative Communication Laws and Policy*. Retrieved September 24, 2015, from <https://www.books.google.com.pk/books>
16. Eko, L., & Kananovich, V. (2015, May 21). *Freedom of Expression and the Problem of Blasphemy Under American and Russian Law*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association 65th Annual Conference, Caribe Hilton, San Juan. Retrieved October 11, 2015, from <http://citation.allacademic.com>
17. Foucault, M. (1994). *Sayings and Writings of Michel Foucault, 1954-1988*. Retrieved January 7, 2015, from <http://www.googlebooks.com>
18. George, C. (2013, June). *Journalism and the Politics of Hate: Charting Ethical Responses to Religious Intolerance*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, London, England, Jun 17, 2013. Retrieved March 11, 2015, from <http://www.citation.allacademic.com>
19. Hole, Y., & Snehla, P. & Bhaskar, M. (2019). Porter's five forces model: gives you a competitive advantage. *Journal of Advanced Research in Dynamical and Control System*, 11 (4), 1436-1448.
20. Iqbal, Z. (2011). *Mass Media, the Politics and the Politicians: A Mismatched Troikof Pakistan*. Islamabad: Higher Education Commission- Pakistan. Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*.
21. Khaleej Times. (2012, September 22). Peaceful protests against film in Germany. *Khaleej Times*. Retrieved June 9, 2016, from <http://www.khaleejtimes.com>
22. Kirkpatrick, D. D. (2012, September 12). Anger Over a Film Fuels Anti-American Attacks in Libya and Egypt. *The New York Times*. Retrieved June 8, 2016, from <http://www.nytimes.com>
23. McBride, K. (2010, September 9). *How to Report on Qur'an Burning and Other Hate Speech*. Retrieved from <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/everyday-ethics>
24. Mackey, R., & Stack, L. (2012, September 11). Obscure Film Mocking Muslim Prophet Sparks Anti-U.S. Protests in Egypt and Libya. *New York Times*. Retrieved July 12, 2015, from <http://www.nytimes.com>
25. Marquez, M. (2012, September 17). "Actor: Anti-Islam filmmaker 'was playing us along'". *CNN*. Retrieved June 3, 2015, from <http://www.edition.cnn.com>
26. Marshall, P., & Shea, N. (2011). *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide*. New York: Oxford University Press.
27. Michal, S. (2012, September 15). "Al-Qaeda indicates responsibility for killing US envoy in Libya, urges more attacks". *The Times of Israel*. Retrieved July 8, 2015, from <http://www.timesofisrael.com>
28. Moore, J. R. (2013, October). *Blasphemy Laws and Hate Speech Codes: Threats to Freedom of Expression, Dissent, and Democracy*. Retrieved December 12, 2014, from http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_18_October_2013
29. Neu, J., Sticks, & Stones. (2009). *The Philosophy of Insults*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
30. Pew Forum. (2012). *Laws Penalizing Blasphemy, Apostasy and Defamation of Religion Are Widespread*. Retrieved April 6, 2015, from <http://www.pewforum.org>
31. Pew Research Center. (2016, August 9). *Laws Against Blasphemy, Apostasy and Defamation of Religion*. Retrieved April 2, 2017, from <http://www.pewforum.org>
32. Press TV. (2012a, September 24). "Protest over anti-Islam film held in Swiss capital". Retrieved September 4, 2015, from <http://www.presstv.com>
33. Press TV. (2012b, October 21). *Rally against anti-Islam film held in front of White House*. Retrieved September 4, 2014, from <http://www.presstv.com>
34. Press TV. (2012c, September 14). *Pakistan police clash with angry protesters outside US Embassy*. Retrieved October 3, 2014, from <http://www.presstv.com>
35. Radsch, C. C., & Pollack, R. (2014). *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris: UNESCO Publishers.
36. Raouf, F. (2015). *Modernizing Pakistan's Blasphemy Law as Hate Speech (Masters Thesis)*. Retrieved January 3, 2016, from <http://www.OATD.org>
37. Riesling, G. (2012, September 28). Calif. man behind anti-Muslim film ordered jailed. *Yahoo News*. Retrieved June 8, 2015, from <http://www.news.yahoo.com>
38. San Francisco Chronicle. (2012, September 14). Egyptian Protesters Scale U.S.
39. The Nation. (2012, September 22). Editorial. *The Nation*. Retrieved March 8, 2016, from <http://www.nation.com.pk>

40. Thorgeirsdottir, H. (2006). *Article 13. The Right to Freedom of Expression: A Commentary on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. (A. Alen, J. V. Lanotte, E. Verhellen, F. Ang, E. Berghmans, & M. Verheyde, Eds.) Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
41. Turkishweekly (2012, September 20). France Bans Anti-Muslim Movie Protest. Retrieved July 8, 2015, from The Journal Turkish weekly Web site <http://www.Turkishweekly.net>
42. UDHR. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved May 7, 2014, from ohchr Web site: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR>
43. Victoria, K. (2012, November 7). Innocence of Muslims' filmmaker gets a year in prison. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved March 16, 2015, from <http://www.latimes.com>
44. Weaver, D. H., & Buddenbaum, J. M. (1985). Press Freedom, Media and Development 1950-1979: A study of 134 Nations. *Journal of Communication* (Spring).