Original Article

Warmonger or Peacebuilder: Coverage of Taliban Militancy in the Pakistani Press

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Abstract

This study examines the role of national media, particularly the leading Urdu- and English-language press of Pakistan, under the theoretical perspectives of 'war journalism or peace journalism' in the transformation of the intra-state conflict, the Taliban conflict, in Pakistan. Unlike previous studies conducted on the Taliban, the present investigation, besides examining the agenda-setting and framing roles of the leading press in this intra-state conflict through content analysis, also investigated the structural constraints by employing focus group discussions with journalists who reported this conflict. A content analysis of 832 news stories, published in 481 editions by daily Jang and daily Dawn, indicates that the leading press of Pakistan gave significant coverage to the issue on the front and back pages. Nevertheless, it was dominated by war journalism frames. The focus group discussions revealed that journalists perceived the role of national media as warmonger than peacebuilders and inclined more to war journalism than peace journalism. They identified limited media autonomy, lack of training, absence of official media policy, and the government's indifferent attitude towards the conflict in the initial stages as some of the major structural constraints in doing peace journalism during the coverage of the Taliban conflict.

Keywords: **National media, Taliban conflict, war & peace journalism, cultural constraints**

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Introduction

The flames of intra-state armed conflicts engulf everything and make the nation bleed for decades to come. None of the warring parties wins such battles, while the ultimate losers and sufferers are the ordinary people. National identity is tarnished, infrastructure is ruined, and development halts for a long time. Human losses in intra-state armed conflicts occur in the same nation, whether the trigger is pressed by personnel of law enforcement agencies/military or the so-called insurgents. Shelling, bombardment, and killing of insurgents/separatists by government forces/military, as well as terrorist attacks on civilians, law enforcement agencies/army, and damaging government infrastructure by the insurgents, cannot be regarded as a wise way to resolve intrastate conflicts. Hence, peaceful ways for the transformation of such conflicts need to be contemplated.

The proponents of peace journalism consider mass media to be an important player in peacebuilding and the transformation of armed conflicts. "Peace journalism accuses war journalists of reporting war in an enclosed space and time, with no context, concealing peace initiatives and making wars opaque/secret" (Loyn, 2007, p. 1). Its exponents contend that media normally cover a conflict when it takes the form of violence (Galtung, 1998; Jakobsen, 2000; Kempf, 1999), whereas violence is the facet of conflict when the conflicting groups try to resolve the issue with the use of force. Hence, instead of waiting for the eruption of violence, the media needs to step forward and play its preemptive role in the solution of conflicts before conflicts ignite and turn into violence and destruction. Peace journalists are regarded as a part of the solution rather than part of the problem in conflict situations (McGoldrick, 2000). According to Lynch and McGoldrick (2005):

> Peace journalism is committed to explore the root causes of conflicts and thereby enable the peace journalists to reckon the conflict objectively instead of blindly believing in accounts of the others who have vested interests in the conflict. It (peace journalism) "creates opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict. (p. 6)

 In contrast to peace journalism, war journalism predominantly reports the bare facts of violence and detaches conflict from its broader context, both in time and space (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). Thus, war journalism portrays

conflict as a zero-sum game, where the narrative "us" *vs*. "them" is the predominant frame.

Some seminal studies conducted to investigate the media-war nexus are based on peace/ war journalism theory. Shinar (2006), while investigating Canadian and Israeli media reports on the Lebanon war, found that selected newspapers of both countries used a war journalism approach in their reports more than peace journalism. Ross (2004) investigated the Palestine-Israel conflict in the US media through a peace journalism perspective and found a preponderance of war journalism. Lea and Samuel (2009) viewed that Israeli media followed war journalism and relied on manipulation of content through the juggling of news coverage of the second Lebanon war and the Iranian nuclear threat. Similarly, Rizona and Panayotova (2021), while analyzing the contents of Al Jazeera, BBC, and CNN on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, found that all three network televisions were inclined more towards war journalism than peace journalism in their coverage. They also found that the war-peace framing of the issue was not the same in the selected television channels. Perez and Weissman (2006) investigated media reporting of the Iraq attack in the US newspapers in the context of peace and war journalism. The results indicated that war journalism was dominant as compared to peace journalism in coverage of the selected newspapers.

Moreover, the coverage was linked with foreign policy, so war was promoted as the only solution. Dimitrova and Stromback (2005), while examining media coverage of the Iraq war from the perspective of foreign-national policy, found that the war journalism perspective prevailed more. Newspapers of both countries favored some aspects of the war compared to others (p.414).

Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) investigated the US media coverage of Iran and found that media reporting was propagandistic and reflected the US foreign policy interests. Lee and Maslog (2005), in their study on "War or peace journalism? Asian newspaper coverage of conflicts," by examining print media coverage of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines conflicts, found that the selected newspapers were more inclined towards war journalism than peace journalism. Lee (2010), while investigating the Kashmir issue, a separatist movement in Indonesia, and the LTTE movement in Sri Lanka by applying a peace journalism approach, found that the three conflicts were mainly reported in war journalism fashion. Changkamol (2013) analyzed the conflict in South Thailand from the peace journalism perspective and found that the media in Thailand ignored the real causes and context of the

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conflict and made an artificial link between al-Qaeda and terrorism and the demand of Southern Thailand.

Siraj (2008), employing Galtung's model of peace/ war journalism in his study of coverage of the Pakistan-India conflict in elite US newspapers, found that media coverage was generally tilted more towards war than peace journalism.

Other scholars have analyzed media coverage of the Taliban conflict in Pakistan from the perspective of war/ peace journalism. For example, Iqbal and Hussain (2017), while analyzing the news content of the two leading news television channels, i.e., *Geo News* and *Dunya News*, focused on the "escalatory" or "de-escalatory" nature of news coverage of the Taliban conflict. Their results showed that the coverage of the conflict (Taliban conflict) by *Geo* and *Dunya* television channels was "escalatory" (war journalism oriented). Similarly, Asmat-Ullah (2018), while analyzing coverage of the daily *Dawn* (a leading English-language newspaper of Pakistan) from the perspective of war and peace journalism theory on the Balochistan conflict, which is another intrastate armed conflict in Pakistan, found that the coverage was oriented to war journalism than peace journalism.

A review of the literature shows that although the advocates of peace journalism attach greater expectations with mass media in peaceful solutions and transformation of conflicts, as a matter of fact, mass media, in their coverage of conflicts, especially armed conflicts, usually inclined more toward war journalism than peace journalism. An overview of conflict studies in general shows that the new mass media, in general, have not been used for the lofty ideals of peace journalism. Moreover, some scholars cast doubts on the capability of peace journalism as envisaged by its promoters. For example, Hanitzsch (2007) argues that peace journalism portrays the media as an active player and the audience as a passive recipient of media messages for making their political decisions. He criticizes peace journalism for its lack of epistemological foundation. He claims that supporters of this new journalistic approach pursue an "overly individualistic and voluntaristic perspective," and they argue that a change in the attitude and behavior of conflict reporters will result in peace journalism, which, according to Hanitzsch, is an illusion. Shoemaker and Reese (2013), while discussing the various internal and external influences on media content, also contend that media messages are not produced in a social vacuum. Instead, various social, political, economic, cultural, and ideological factors besides journalists' own intrinsic factors play a key role in shaping media content. Lynch (2007) also pleaded in favor of considering the structural constraints, though they might not be considered the

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only determining factors. Hanitzsch (2007) criticizes peace journalism for ignoring structural constraints affecting journalists' professional duties.

As far as previous studies conducted on conflicts in Pakistan are concerned, they either focused on political/social/cultural/economic aspects of the disputes or remained limited to the role of mass media only (war journalism or peace journalism) and ignored structural determinants of these conflicts. For example, Khan and Khan (2021), Azim, Mehmood, and Hussain (2018); Hussain & Lynch, 2018 Rasool (2012), and Orakzai (2011) all discussed the social, political, and economic causes of intrastate armed conflicts in Pakistan, but they did not consider the role of press/ media. On the other hand, other scholars looking at the role of media (peace/ war journalism) in the Taliban conflict (Iqbal & Hussain, 2017; Hussian, 2016; Siraj, 2008) kept their investigations limited to media content only and did not examine the structural constraints.

To fill these theoretical and methodological gaps in the literature, the present study has been designed to explore the role of media in the Taliban[2] conflict in Pakistan, an intrastate armed conflict, under the theoretical perspective of war and peace journalism by employing mixed methods (content analysis and focus group discussions). The rationale behind using the mixed method was to investigate the media's role as warmongers or peacebuilders (war/peace journalism) through content analysis and to examine the structural constraints faced by media men by employing focus discussions with journalists who remained associated with reporting the Taliban conflict.

Hence, the researcher designed the present study to examine the role of national mass media, especially the leading Urdu and English press, in the conflict in Pakistan. The researcher tried to address research questions like (1) how much coverage was given to the Taliban conflict by the leading Urdu- and English-language press of Pakistan? (2) What were the dominant frames (peace or war) in media coverage of the Taliban conflict? What were the perceptions of local journalists about the role of national mass media in the

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[2] According to encyclopedia Britannica "Taliban …. are ultraconservative political and religious faction that emerged in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s following the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the collapse of Communist regime and the subsequent breakdown in civil order". Taliban here refers to Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an outlawed terrorist organization operating in Pakistan. While the Taliban conflict means the intra-state armed conflict between Taliban and the government of Pakistan.

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peaceful transformation of the Taliban conflict? What constraints did journalists face in objective and professional reporting on the Taliban conflict?

Theoretical Framework

The present investigation is based on Galtung's model of war and peace journalism as its theoretical framework. The model contained four categories of war journalism (violence, propaganda, elite, and differences) and four categories of peace journalism (peace, truth, people, and solution). Nevertheless, as we know later, other researchers (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Lee & Maslog, 2005; Fahmy & Neumann, 2012) worked on this model and added more categories. The researcher has adopted Lee and Maslog's (2005) nine categories of the war/peace journalism model in this study. It has been given as below:

Table 1
Indicators of war and peace journalism

War journalism	Peace journalism
Differences oriented	Solution oriented
Visible effects	Invisible effects
Elite oriented	People oriented
Here and now oriented	Causes and effects oriented
Propaganda oriented	Truth oriented
Two-party oriented	Multi-party oriented
Partisan	Non-partisan
Zero-sum-oriented	Win-win oriented
Use of demonizing language	Avoid demonizing language

This study employed a mixed approach using content analysis and focus group discussion techniques.

Content Analysis

The study analyzed both the front and back pages of daily *Jang* and daily *Dawn*, which are the most circulated Urdu- and English-language newspapers

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in Pakistan, respectively. The time period of the study was from January 2005 to December 31, 2016. The population of the study was news stories published on the front and back pages of the selected newspapers regarding the Taliban conflict. Keeping in view the long period of the study (12 years) and to make the study manageable, the researcher used a constructed year sampling technique. He selected January from 2005, February from 2006, March in 2007, April in 2008, May in 2009, June in 2010, July in 2011, August in 2012, September in 2013, October in 2014, November in 2015, and December in 2016. In this way, he constructed one year. A code sheet was used as a data-gathering tool for the present inquiry. The code sheet was designed considering the extensive literature review and the findings of focus group discussions conducted before conducting the content analysis.

Topics

The researcher selected certain topics relating to the Taliban conflict for data collection. These topics were terrorism, anti-terrorism, displacement of local people, losses of property and lives, reconciliation talks, sufferings of the local community, rehabilitation process, cross-border involvement, enforcement of Shariah, military operation, legislation, condemnation, and madrassa.

Operationalization of the Concepts

Operational definitions are important for any study as they explain the ways and procedures to be followed in measuring the concepts; however, researchers in social sciences usually measure indicators of the concepts rather than measuring them directly (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

The concept of "role" in the present study was conceptualized from the war/ peace journalism perspective. In contrast, war journalism was operationalized by using nine indicators of this phenomenon given by Lee and Maslog (2005). Similarly, peace journalism was also operationalized by using the nine indicators of the Lee and Maslog model for measuring peace journalism. The concept of "national media" in this study means the country's leading English and Urdu daily newspapers. Daily *Jang* is the most circulated Urdu-language newspaper, and *Dawn* is the most famous and widely circulated English newspaper in Pakistan. Hence, the researchers selected both of these newspapers for content analysis. Rules were designed to determine the presence or absence of any of the indicators of war and peace journalism in the coverage of the selected dailies during the study period.

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Table 2

Code sheet and categorization scheme for newspapers on the Taliban conflict

Variables	Categories	Rules
1. Newspaper ID	1. English newspaper (*Dawn*) 2. Urdu Newspaper (*Jang*)	*Dawn* was coded as 1. *Jang* was coded as 2.
2. Page	1. Front page 2. Back page 3. Front & back pages both	Front page was coded as 1. Back page was coded as 2. Editions which carry news regarding Taliban conflict both on front and back pages were coded as 3.
3. Visibility of news	Ratio scale	Presence of the story was coded on ratio scale. The number of times news regarding Taliban conflict appeared on front, back and both front and back pages was coded as visibility of news.
4. Source of the story	1. Newspaper's own reporter/ correspondent 2. Monitoring 3. News agency report 4. press release/ handout	1. Newspaper own reporter/ correspondent was coded as 1. 2. Monitoring report was coded as 2. 3. News agency report was coded as 3. 4. Press release/ handout was coded as 4.
5. Peace frames	PJ1. Invisible effects of war PJ2. Solution oriented	1. News story containing information on Emotional trauma, damage to society and culture will be considered as having invisible effects of peace frame (peace journalism). This frame was coded as PJ1. 2. News story regarding solution of the conflict will be considered as having Solution oriented frame of peace journalism (PJ) and was coded as PJ2.

	PJ3. People-oriented	3. News story mentioning common people as the sources of information and focusing on common people instead of the waring parties was considered as having people-oriented frame of PJ and was coded as PJ 3.
	PJ4.Causes and consequences frame	News story mentioning causes and future effects of the conflict was considered as having Causes and Consequences frame of PJ and was coded as PJ4.
	PJ5. Truth-oriented	News stories which expose untruths of all by verifying the contents/facts from different sources was considered as truth-oriented and was coded as PJ5
	PJ6. Multi-party orientation	News story mentioning multi-parties including all stakeholders relating to the conflict was considered as having Multi-parties Orientation frame of PJ and was coded as PJ6.
	PJ7. Win–win orientation	News story which did not mention gains/ defeats, were considered as win-win oriented frame of PJ. This frame (win-win orientation) was coded as PJ7.

Stories that are not taking sides were considered as non-partisan and were coded as PJ8. |

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	PJ8. Non-partisan PJ9. Avoid demonizing language	News story which avoided words/ phrases like terrorists, Kafir, criminals, anti-Pakistan, enemy of Islam, foreign agents, mercenaries, religious fanatics, foreign funded, fundamentalists, barbaric acts was considered as peace journalism's frame "avoiding demonizing language". This frame was coded as PJ9.
7. War Frames	WJ1. Visible effects of war: Casualties, dead, wounded.	News story containing information on visible damages to property, infrastructure, people, etc was considered as having visible effects of war frame This frame was coded as WJ1.
	WJ2. Differences oriented: Report leads to the conflict. WJ3. Elite-oriented	News stories focusing on difference between the conflicting parties was considered as War journalism and was coded as WJ2. News stories focusing on leaders and elites as actors and sources of information and focus of the news story were viewed as having War journalism and they were coded as WJ3. News stories regarding the war arena only were considered as War journalism and were coded as WJ4.

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	WJ4. Here and now	News stories that promote one party's claims/ lies without validating through neutral sources or including the version of the other waring party of the conflict, were considered as having the "propaganda frame" and were coded as WJ5.
	WJ5. Propaganda-oriented	News stories just mentioning the two parties' losses/ wins without referring to third party (common people of the area and impact on infrastructure/ culture, etc) were considered as having war journalism and were coded as WJ6.
	WJ6. Two-party orientation	News stories showing positive bias towards one party and negative bias by using positive and negative words/ phrases for the other party were considered as having war journalism frame and were coded as WJ7.
	WJ7. Partisan	News stories focusing only on losses and wins of one party or the other were considered as war journalism framed and were coded as WJ8.
	WJ8. Zero-sum orientation	News stories containing phrases like terrorists, criminals, Kafir, enemy of Islam, traitors, foreign agent, extremists, fundamentalists, religious fanatics, foreign funded elements, mercenaries, barbaric acts were considered as war journalism and were coded as WJ9.

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	WJ9 Use of Demonizing language	
7. Topics of the Story	i. Terrorism ii. Anti-terrorism iii. Losses of properties and lives iv. Reconciliation Talks v. Sufferings and displacement of Local community vi. Taliban vii. Shariah viii. Madrasas ix. Missing persons x. Cross border terrorism. xi. Military Operation xii. Legislation/ condemnation	
Visibility of frames	1. presence of indicators of peace Journalism frames 2. Presence of indicators of war journalism frames/ indicators.	The presence of peace journalism frames/ indicators was coded by using ratio level. The presence of war journalism frames is represented using ratio scale.

Intercoder Reliability

In this study, two coders were involved in coding and entering data into the SPSS files. They were given training for this purpose. Moreover, before the final data entry by these coders, a pilot study was conducted on the coders to examine the intercoder reliability of the coding schemes. The researchers calculated the Cohen Kappa coefficient through SPSS to determine the inter-coder reliability. The value of Cohen Kappa's coefficient was .90, which means excellent agreement/ intercoder reliability between the coders.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were solely conducted with local journalists associated with various local/national/ regional and international news media organizations to know how they covered this intrastate conflict? What problems did they face while reporting the conflict? Were they influenced by the conflicting parties? What were their perceptions about the role of national news mass media as warmongers or peacebuilders in this bloody intrastate conflict?

The population for the focus group was journalists registered with the Mingora Press Club. A purposive sampling technique was employed for the selection of the focus group participants. Members of the focus group were selected on the basis of their experience in the field of journalism. Those who had at least ten years of journalistic experience and had the opportunity to cover the Taliban conflict were selected.

Before initiating formal group discussions, the researcher distributed copies of a sheet among group members. The sheet contained questions regarding the respondents' basic demographic information. They were asked to fill it out and return it to the researcher. The researcher used a guide during the discussions, which contained the main questions and topics to be covered during the session. Besides note-taking, he also used a tape recorder to record audio tapes of various sessions of the group interviews.

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Figure: 1
Analysis Map of Focus Group Discussion
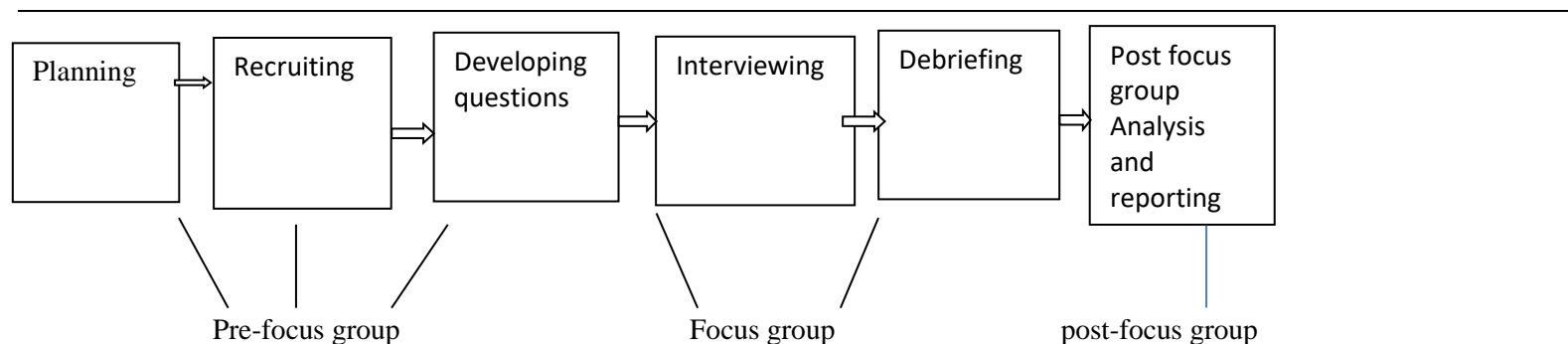
Results of Content Analysis

Visibility of News on Taliban Conflict

To answer the first research question (RQ1) regarding the extent of coverage given to the Taliban conflict by the selected newspapers, the researcher analyzed the collected data and found that during the selected period of the study, both the papers published 730 editions, out of which 481 editions carried one or more stories per day whereas 249 editions did not carry any news story on the conflict. Table 02, given below, shows that a total of 832 news stories were collectively published in 481 editions by Daily *Jang* and Daily *Dawn*. These papers published one news story per issue in 258 editions, while 128, 73, 15, 04,02, and 01 editions carried two, three, four, five, six, and seven news stories on the conflict.

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Table 3

Visibility of news on the Taliban conflict in the selected newspapers

Frequency of Taliban conflict news per day	# editions	Percent	Valid percent
1	258	35.3	53.6
2	128	17.5	26.6
3	73	10.0	15.2
4	15	2.1	3.1
5	4	.5	.8
6	2	.3	.4
7	1	.1	.2
Total Missing system Total	481 (832) 249 730	65.9 34.1 100	100

Valid= 832
Missing= 249

Analysis of the data on the placement of news stories on the conflict (Table 3) showed that the selected newspapers published 429, 131, and 272 news stories on the front page, back page, and both front and back pages in that order.

Table 4

Frequency distribution of placement of news on the Taliban conflict

Frequency	Placement of News		
	Front Page	Back Page	F/B pages Both
1	165	92	0
2	57	16	54
3	36	1	37
4	8	1	6
5	2	0	2
6	0	0	2
7	0	0	1
	268 (429)	110 (131)	102 (272)

Front page n = 429, Back page n= 131, Front and back pages n= 272
Total N = 832

Indicators of Peace/War Journalism in the Coverage of Taliban Conflict

Comparative analysis of the collected data regarding coverage of the Taliban conflict for war and peace journalism indicators found press coverage of the conflict was predominantly war journalism oriented. Table 4 indicates that the cumulative frequency of the various war frames/ indicators was 3112 compared to the 1562 peace journalism frames in the selected newspapers' coverage.

Table 5
Frequency Distribution of Indicators of War and Peace Journalism in Coverage of Taliban Conflict

Peace Jour. Indicators	Sum	War Jour. Indicators	Sum
Invisible effects of war	237	Visible effects of war	329
Solution oriented	135	Differences oriented	413
People Oriented	219	Elite oriented	348
Causes and consequences	163	Here and now	316
Truth-oriented	175	Propaganda-oriented	387
Multi-party orientation	227	Two-party orientation	312
Non-partisan	164	Partisan	305
Win-win orientation	73	Zero-sum orientation	329
Avoid demonizing language	169	Use of demonizing language	373
Total	1562		3112

Analysis of Focus Group Data

After transcribing the focus group discussions, the focus group data were analyzed through thematic analysis. A list of themes was created, and the same was displayed in the concept map of the focus group as well. Then, relevant comments and quotes from the focus group participants were collated under each theme. A descriptive summary of the focus group followed this process.

The researcher focused on perceptions of journalists regarding the role of the national media in the Taliban conflict as a warmonger or peacebuilder, the hurdles in access to information during the conflict, the influence of the warring parties in reporting facts, the role of media in projecting issues faced by the local community; and other relevant problems in reporting the Taliban conflict during the focus group discussion with local journalists of Mangora Press Club, Swat.

The following figure shows concept themes extracted from transcriptions of the focus group discussion.

Figure 2

Concept Map of "Role of Media" Extracted from Focus Group Discussions

attitude
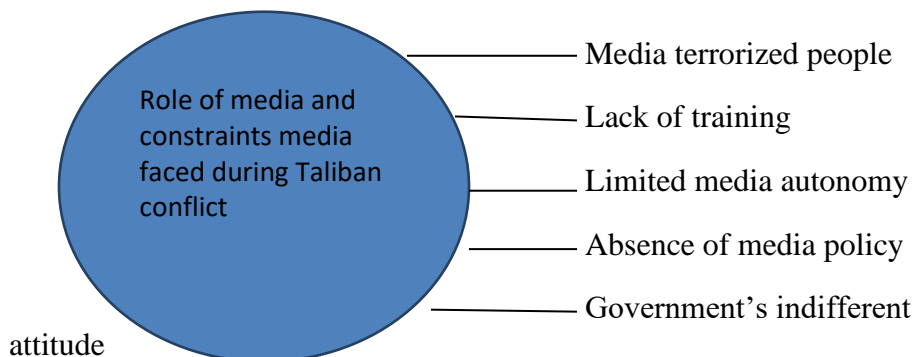
Media Terrorized People

Members of the focus group expressed dissatisfaction with the media's role during the Taliban conflict. One participant said, "I believe that some media persons played a negative role in this conflict by creating an atmosphere of fear, which was the agenda of militants, and the media promoted their agenda. They (the Taliban) wanted to terrorize people and the media by reporting the bare acts of terrorism that helped them achieve their objective. They showed dead bodies lying in the streets, along with horrifying captions. I think this type of reporting is not responsible journalism. Media, particularly local media, was involved in exaggeration as well."

Another respondent observed, "I believe that 70 percent of the role of local media in this conflict was negative. Journalists had no idea how to report the conflict and what the consequences of their reporting would be. Local media reported the decapitated bodies, the beheading of people by the Taliban, and stories of bloodshed and destruction. I am confident in claiming that such media outlets did not even imagine the consequences of such reporting. The main purpose of such reporting was only to do business."

Some participants viewed that the local media played their due role, and for this purpose even they (local journalists) sacrificed their lives and bore economic losses. One respondent said, "Local media in the conflict zones played their role very well. Some of our colleagues did not even leave Swat,

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while common people migrated to safer regions as IDPs. They were performing their professional duties at the risk of their own lives."

Another journalist said, "I own the cable network of Swat, and I gave a lot of coverage to local people's issues and their problems during this conflict, although Taliban had destroyed my cable unit with bombs thrice." Another respondent said, "Our four colleagues were killed in this conflict."

One respondent said, "Local media not only informed the local population; rather, the national and international media were also dependent on us for news stories regarding this conflict."

Untrained Local Media

Participants of the focus group observed that local journalists portrayed the Taliban positively during the Taliban conflict due to a "lack of professionalism and knowledge of the basic role of media. Even some of our colleagues suffered life losses due to unawareness of the tricks of conflict coverage. Local journalists were not trained in conflict reporting." "I believe that this is the age of 5th generation war in which people's perception is made through media. In this conflict, our journalists were not trained much so that they could tackle all the skills and demands of conflict communication", observed another group participant. Another member responded, "Some journalists lost their lives while reporting this conflict. I think it was because of their lack of training in war reporting".

The respondents expressed the need to train Pakistani journalists in conflict reporting. One respondent said, **"**Our journalists lack specialized reporting skills and techniques, especially conflict reporting. Hence, capacity-building training needs to be imparted to our journalists. Unfortunately, the government is not playing its role in building the professional skills of media persons." "The media persons need full-fledged training on pre-conflict, during-conflict, and post-conflict phases. A group member remarked that such training will enable our media to play an important peace-making role in armed conflicts," a group member remarked.

Limited Media Autonomy

The majority of the group members complained about the lack of freedom in covering the Taliban conflict. One group member remarked, "There was pressure from both the Taliban and the army." Another said, "We were sandwiched between the Taliban and the army."

Still, another member said, "Unfortunately, the situation at that time was very bad and challenging for the journalists. If the Taliban were mentioned as "martyred" in a news story, then the army got annoyed with us, and when the army personnel was reported as "martyred" then Taliban got displeased with the media."

While narrating his own experience, one respondent said, "One day, the most notorious commander of the Taliban called me and asked me to stop CNN, BBC, Dawn News, and some other news channels from my cable network. I replied, "It is not possible I cannot shut down these channels because people pay me for these channels. He said, "Then prepare for a bomb blast."

"In my opinion, the purpose of killing journalists was to pressure journalists to report according to their demands," one respondent observed. "At the start of the conflict, both parties were not allowing the media to report freely. Both parties were censoring information that they didn't want to publish. They wanted us to report what was in their own interests, said one respondent.

One respondent said, "There was no access to information for journalists". Another respondent said, "This is the duty of media to stop extremism from spreading in the society and discourage conflicts, and government responsibility is to facilitate media rather than putting sanctions on media and cubing media freedom."

Government Indifferent Attitude

The group members opined that although local media reported about the conflict well before it surfaced, the government should have paid more heed to such news in the pre-conflict period. One participant said, "Journalists reported about the activities of militants. They wrote stories and columns to inform policymakers that the Taliban's narrative was getting accepted among the local people. But the local administration and government did nothing to stop them (Taliban) in the start."

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Another group member said, "We were sensing the threat of Talibanization in the region. We reported the growing popularity of the Taliban, particularly in Swat, in our news stories. Tribal areas of the country and Afghanistan were already under the influence of the Taliban. The government was supposed to take some steps to ward off Talibanization in the very beginning, but unfortunately, no action was taken."

Absence of Official Media Policy and Counter-propaganda

Participants of the group discussion viewed that Mullah Radio of Maulana Fazlullah was constantly disseminating anti-state propaganda, but the government did not take any action against it. Fazlullah used his FM radio as a tool for preaching his religious views and making public opinion in his favor by broadcasting religious content embedded with his ideology. The echo of Fazlullah's anti-state propaganda was constantly emanating from the loudspeakers of his Madrassa in Imam Dheri. Neither the law enforcement agencies nor PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) took timely notice of the sugarcoated propaganda of Mullah Fazlullah. In response to the Taliban's narrative of enforcement of *Shariah* and blaming the government for an alliance with the USA and NATO against their Muslim brothers in Kabul, the government did not take any counter-propaganda measures timely. Even when the local media propagated the narrative of Fazlullah and TTP in the area, the government did not advise those media outfits. All these factors hint towards the non-existence of official media policy.

Discussion and Conclusion

Keeping in view analyses of quantitative data collected in the present investigation and their results, the researchers can conclude that the leading print media of Pakistan gave more coverage to the Taliban conflict. News regarding this intrastate conflict was placed comparatively more on the front pages than the back pages of both the Urdu and English press, which showed the agenda of the leading Urdu and English newspapers of Pakistan on the Taliban conflict. Nevertheless, they were tilted more towards war journalism than peace journalism. Hence, media (print media) coverage of the conflict could lead to conflict incitement rather than conflict resolution. They proved to be warmongers than peacebuilders in intrastate armed conflict situations.

Focus group discussion also revealed that Pakistan's mass media were following war journalism instead of peace journalism in their coverage of the Taliban conflict. Considering these findings, the researcher concludes that

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Pakistan media did not play a noteworthy role in either avoiding the Taliban conflict or de-escalating this bloody intrastate conflict. Journalists who covered this conflict revealed that they lacked proper training for such intrastate conflicts and were unaware of the consequences of their war-oriented coverage.

Nonetheless, for this inadequate role of Pakistan media in peace journalism, they (mass media) may not be held solely responsible; instead, some other outside media factors did not allow Pakistan print media to play a proactive role in avoiding this conflict, contributing to peacebuilding, and resolution of this conflict. These factors were control of media from both the warring parties for promoting their respective agenda, lack of access to factual information, and absence of official media policy on how to tackle the propaganda by the Taliban. More importantly, the government needed to take proper steps for the media agenda on the issue of the Taliban. It can also be concluded that other stakeholders, particularly the religious leaders who were essential actors in government policy in Afghan Jihad, were not taken into confidence for the policy shift towards Kabul and Taliban by the government of Pakistan. The media, public, and policy agendas were not on the same page at the beginning of the Taliban conflict.

The focus group discussions revealed that news sources from both sides forced journalists to portray them positively and serve their interests. Such findings challenge the assumptions of Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model, which sees official sources as one of the filters of news. Chomsky's propaganda model shows that mass media are willfully dependent on official sources for news materials. Still, contrary to this assumption, findings of the present study indicate that mass media, especially in conflict reporting, are neither intentionally dependent on official sources nor the sources of information are limited only to official ones. Both the conflicting parties want positive portrayals in mass media, and for that purpose, they dictate the media and the reporters.

Keeping in view the results of content analysis and focus group discussion, it can be concluded that mass media cannot play the role of peacebuilder in intrastate armed conflicts until and unless they are given free access to information, professional liberty to journalists is ensured by conflicting parties, the government takes both preemptive and reactive measures against anti-state propaganda by state enemies, proper media policy in the pre-conflict stage is formulated, and proper capacity building of local conflict reporters is executed.

21

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