

Role of Media in Pakistan's Politics: Challenges and Way forward

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Abstract

Motivation behind this paper is current political situation and the role media is playing. Media and politics are interdependent for democracy. Media is, no doubt, considered as the 4th pillar of the state on account of its significant role. The four pillars of state: judiciary, legislature, executive and media must learn to live together while remaining in their respective domains for mutual coexistence. This article will explore the pivotal role of media in shaping Pakistan's political landscape. This study is qualitative in nature for which secondary data is collected and analyzed to find conclusion. This study identified the challenges faced by the media industry, such as censorship, political influence, and ethical dilemmas, which have implications for democratic processes. The article also discusses potential solutions and a way forward, emphasizing the need for a free and responsible media that can serve as a watchdog, promote transparency, and facilitate informed citizenry. Ultimately, it highlights the critical role media in Pakistan's politics and the necessity for reforms to ensure its continued positive impact on the nation's governance.

Keywords: Pakistan, Media, Democracy, Politics, strengths & weaknesses, Challenges, Way forward.

Introduction

Globalization has made the world almost a village due to the rapid advancement of information technology and the widespread use of electronic media. These days, there are no restrictions on where information, news, or events can be found worldwide. Before the governments can respond or take action, these events instantly spread to every living room. Influencing social, economic, and political spheres is the media's growing role. Views shaped by media pictures determine one's thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions. All groups, including elites, commoners, decision-makers, and statesmen, have been affected by it in their daily lives. For political and military objectives, states have frequently tended to employ the media as a propaganda tool. Media is a powerful tool of information, communication, awareness, and education, public opinion making and analyzing the performance of different political and military regimes. Pakistan, a developing state with multiple socio-economic, political and security issues, is not insulated from the media effects of contemporary world. These days, the Pakistani media is described as more open, blunt and proactive (Hussain, 2012).

These days, it draws attention to the nation's social injustices, economic incompetence, and political incorrectness. Pakistani media has developed into a potent tool for closely examining how state institutions are run throughout time. The media covers political campaigns of political parties during elections, but they also conduct critical analyses of their performance in office. Since the media has the power to either build or damage a nation's reputation, it plays a vital and important role in all nations. Media should be liberal but still under proper ethical code of business. The freedom of media should not dent the image of Pakistan in the world. Originally the print media and later on mushroom growth of electronic media during General Musharraf dictatorship (2002) and of late, unbridled social media has played major role in the political landscape of Pakistan. Pakistani media has experienced many ups and downs in the form of restrictions; however, it has managed to maintain its place, relevance and importance in politics. Media is faced with various challenges in Pakistan which requires critical analysis and workable solutions to minimize those challenges so that the role of media in politics is utilized in most advantageous way (Khan, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, Media has played a pivotal role in Pakistan's politics both in civil and military regimes. Presently, its role has come under tremendous scrutiny and has raised many questions regarding its professionalism, impartiality and neutrality. Therefore, media's role in politics in Pakistan and challenges faced by it needs critical and objective analysis. It will lead to a more objective and non-controversial role of media in the future political system of Pakistan.

Scope of the Study

This study attempts to highlight the role of different types of Media in Pakistan's politics. Being current issue topic, its scope is limited to latest media news covering political landscape of Pakistan and how they shape and divide the public opinion. However, the role of media is restricted only to politics and challenges faced by it.

Literature Review

The independence of the media has historically been severely curtailed by Pakistan's military governments. However, General Musharraf passed legislation that significantly liberalized the electronic media, possibly in an effort to use the media

to his regime's advantage. Then, this (especially TV discussion shows) spread widely, but ingrained power dynamics hindered the rise of opposing viewpoints, and the media came to be viewed as consistently uncritical of the military. Furthermore, the state employed strategies to stifle media independence, including sending intelligence operatives inside media conglomerates and purchasing journalists' services on the black market. The military-imposed media rules in Pakistan have not been discussed in the legislature. The media's capacity to be a force for change is limited by the absence of democratic discourse. In addition, despite fighting for media freedoms, journalists have not put enough effort into raising the standard of their reporting (Shahzad, 2021).

People have a platform to voice their opinions thanks to the media. It improved their awareness of their rights and provided voters with an opportunity to interact and question the candidates they had selected. Electronic and social media have contributed to the development of a more politically engaged and knowledgeable society in Pakistan. The prevailing belief that has shaped Pakistani politics for many years is that people only have short-term memories, although this contradicts that basic idea. This time, the people had far more tools at their disposal than simple recall. They made good use of their phone and social media. Voters in Pakistan got the chance to speak with candidates from both parties for the first time in the 2018 elections. This led to a sharp rise in the use of electronic and social media. Social media was utilized by political parties, independent candidates, and regular voters to their advantage during the race. Political parties employed social media as a tool for strategic communication, but it also served as a forum for common people to express their thoughts and a rival to traditional media.(Ghani, 2020).

By using the media may advance freedom, hasten the democracy process, and equip activists to combat dictatorial governments. With relation to Middle East politics in particular, new media platforms like blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have been extremely influential in political confrontations. The idea that social media having an impact on politics has gained popularity thanks to the "Arab Spring". Egypt is among the top twenty nations with the most internet users, according to the Global Internet Users and Population Data. Social networking, a rapidly evolving technology, has two effects on the Middle East. Better solutions are being found for communication demands, and social media is having an influence on everyday people's political and social lives. With the unique circumstances and Middle Eastern demography, social media has increased the audience's clout. However, given Pakistan's distinct circumstances and demographic makeup, it is irrelevant there. The traditional media in Pakistan is already driving change, and the country's media landscape is at its most liberal. Television networks in Pakistan are already using social media and the internet to steal information. For example, the "flogging video" of a girl from Swat, Pakistan, that was posted on YouTube on March 26, 2009, was immediately covered by all television news channels. Following that, a lot of news items were pulled off the internet and used by Pakistan's conventional media(Saeed,2020).

In modern culture, electronic media is still quite significant. Television is still popular with people. In comparison to social media, it provides more reliable news. Because the news being spread on social media sites may be accurate or inaccurate, it may need to be verified. Electronic media has maintained pressure on the ruling administration to perform well since the end of the print media era. Electronic media has such a broad audience that any criticism of the government or issue might get them into difficulty and force them to deal with the backlash of the general populace. On live TV broadcasts, journalists and anchors must ask challenging questions to government officials or spokespeople. Between 2010 and 2011, social media had a significant impact on Pakistani politics. Before 2010, individuals followed electronic media more often than they did social media. After 2010–2011, Pakistan enters the full power of the social media age. Electronic and social media both have a significant impact on Pakistani politics throughout time (Frooq, 2023).

Methodology

The study mainly uses descriptive and qualitative methodology for which secondary sources of data are considered. Due to paucity of time, it cannot cover the historical evolution of media's role in politics in Pakistan.

Population

The study's population consists of all political media content generated and distributed during the previous 20 years through a variety of media outlets in Pakistan. Print media (magazines, newspapers), electronic media (radio, television), and digital media (blogs, social media platforms, and news websites) are all included in this. In addition, political comments, editorials, opinion pieces, news stories, and media assessments from domestic and foreign sources are taken into account in the study.

Unit of Analysis

Individual media pieces that discuss, report on, or analyze Pakistan's political environment will serve as the research's analytical unit. This covers news stories, editorials, opinion pieces, radio broadcasts, social media posts, and blog entries, as well as television news segments. Every media item will be examined to learn more about how the media shapes political debate, the difficulties encountered, and possible solutions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Through systematic searches of online resources, databases, and media archives, secondary data will be gathered. The information will be arranged and classified according to themes that are pertinent to the goals of the study, like the impact of the media on public opinion, media bias, the difficulties that the media faces, and suggestions for enhancing the media's involvement in politics. The data will be subjected to thematic analysis in order to find, examine, and present patterns. This approach enables a thorough analysis of the material and aids in identifying recurrent themes and ideas on the function of the media in Pakistani politics.

Analysis of Issues & Challenges

Constitutional Position/ Status

The Constitution of Pakistan Article 19 states that *'every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by the law.....'* Therefore, the freedom of expression and speech is enshrined in the very basis and spirit of the legal foundations of the country (Iraqi & Sariyo, 2017).

Types of Media

- Print (Newspapers, Magazines, Journals, Weekly & Monthly Reviews)
- Electronic (TV & Radio)
- Social media(Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Blogs etc) (Khan, 2009).

Functions of Media

- Reporting on current affairs;
- Educating the public
- Raising public knowledge of socio-political and economic issues
- Highlighting the shortcomings of government
- Offering critiques of proposed policies.
- Establishing a civilized government.
- As an oversight role for the government (Hussain, 2012).

Strengths of Media of Pakistan

One of electronic media's strengths is that it can make it more difficult for authorities and governments to hide instances of power abuse and poor governance. It can also swiftly rally public opinion in support of reformist projects. Pakistani media is failed to grasp the soft power of the media, which is mostly how image is built around the world. The media is an extremely powerful weapon for shaping and controlling societal perceptions. Pakistani media, which was completely governed by the state and whose private sector is still in its infancy, has been instrumental in bringing about a significant transformation in our society. (Iraqi & Sariyo, 2017). It involves holding those in positions of authority accountable and making a significant contribution to mass social justice, women's emancipation, the exposure of corruption, mass empowerment, and increased awareness. The foundation of media coverage is politics because it shapes the reality of perception that serves as the foundation for action. The media portrays the political environment. Newspaper stories and conversation shows on television and radio have an impact on people. People are kept informed and up to date about global events, including those in Pakistan, via the media. Pakistani media is quite active, especially electronic media. (Awan, 2019).

Weaknesses of Media

The weakness is that its nature of real-time operations can dilute the filtration process of verifying information. Real-time media can get sucked into a race for ratings which can result in sensationalist and hysterical media that can end up distorting perceptions about political issues (Rehman, 2014).

Current Scenario of Media

- Sensationalism has replaced ethical journalism in Pakistani media, causing a major crisis of credibility.
- It has evolved into a statement-driven news organization where facts and opinions are combined and the distinction between analysis and opinion is purposefully blurred. (Shoaib, 2020).
- Also, media being itself targeted and under threat seems to be left in limbo to take any clear-cut stance on hard core issues like terrorism, extremism, civil-military relations and national security (Media and politics, 2010)..

Role of Media in Pakistan's Politics

Pakistani society's social structure has been significantly influenced by its media. Pakistani media has seen many changes in the shape of restrictions during the past 72 years, yet they have also been able to hold onto its status and significance in society.

Prior to examining the function of Pakistani media, it is important to consider a few sometimes-universal facts regarding the attitudes and quirks of the media. Since broadcasting is an industry worth billions of dollars, making money is the primary goal rather than improving society. Media has to be competitive, unique, and first due to the fierce rivalry in the industry. In order to stand out, the media searches for contentious, dramatic, and unfavorable stories to publish.

Because media professionals are people with a tendency to be egotistical and self-centered, it is unrealistic to expect them to be completely unbiased. The media believes that has the authority to use its prisms to determine which activities are good and harmful for society. The best instrument for advancing political and military goals has been the media. It can, however, overthrow governments and has its own agenda. Because of the influence and function of the media, it is seen as the final foundation of the state. The four pillars of state—the judiciary, legislature, executive branch, and media—must learn to coexist while continuing to practice their various spheres of influence, as previous President Pervez Musharraf put it. These four pillars must perform their duties without fear or indifference and coexist with each other.

Similar to numerous other emerging nations, Pakistan too has friction and tension between its pillars as a result of state intervention in other areas. The media in Pakistan is dramatic, unrestricted but unjust, overly critical, and occasionally unfavorable in its reporting. It has evolved into an additional interest group that fiercely defends its own. Any limitations that attempt to restrict his freedom are met with extreme sensitivity (Maqbool).

The complexities of disputes, violence, and inner and outer security are frequently misunderstood by Pakistani media. The most frequent errors are as follows:

- The media takes an illogical stance, ignoring polarization, poverty, and government neglect, and as a result, inevitably promotes violence while ignoring alternatives.
- Person acts of violence are highlighted at the expense of underlying issues such as poverty, repression, and powerful people's neglect.
- Make some people seem nice and use their standards to condemn others.
- Does not include or mention the bereaved, therefore it never explains why retaliatory acts and violent tendencies occur.
- Neglects to investigate the causes of the situation's escalation and the role that media coverage played in it.
- Keep the intentions of powerful external interventionists a secret.

Up until 2014, the media in Pakistan praised extremists and militants, which not only supported extremist organizations and groups but also accelerated the rate and intensity of societal radicalization. The radicals win the media war by first using free media to spread their horrifying killings and then using politicians and pundits to spread their manifesto (Awan, 2019).

Media violence and the depiction of violent events on television have a devastating effect on society. It has extremely detrimental long-term consequences on young people and kids. In their attacks, the media fails to discern between the government and the state. While it is acceptable to criticize the government, doing so against the state is not justifiable. Media spokespeople frequently lack understanding of national concerns. A crucial component of media strategies at both the national and media levels is making a clear separation and maintaining an equilibrium between the media and the interests of the country. Strong mass media is not publicly driven, but rather by the financial interests of sponsors (Zahra, 2022). The adage, "We don't have an obligation to make history," is being adopted by the media. It is not required of us to create art. It is not required of us to issue a statement. Our sole goal is to become wealthy. Not all of Pakistan's events are negative. Conversely, there is nothing positive discussed by the local media. All around the world, the contours of our genuine identities are being eroded and diminished by such reporting. Pakistani media is failed to grasp the indirect influence of the media, which is mostly how image is built around the world. The media is an extremely powerful weapon for shaping and controlling societal perceptions. Pakistani media generally ignores what the public wants to see and hear, and they do not represent the entire society. Many media outlets impose strong political, cultural, social, and ideological preconceptions on the general public.

Pakistani media, which was completely governed by the state and whose private sector is still in its infancy, has been instrumental in bringing about a significant transformation in our society. It involves holding those in positions of authority accountable and making a significant contribution to mass social justice, women's emancipation, the exposure of corruption, mass empowerment, and increased awareness. A review of Pakistani media's historical contributions has demonstrated that, on the whole, they are highly beneficial and helpful in bringing about measurable social change. It has a few ailments that, if treated, will strengthen and improve its function. (Awan, 2019)

Critical Analysis of the role of media in Pakistan

Every nation's media plays a vital and important function since it has the power to build or damage the perception of the nation among millions of responders both inside and outside the nation. The media should be liberal, but not so liberal and unrestrained that it mocks important and noteworthy figures as well as national identities. Because the media in Pakistan is only interested in competing with one another rather than serving the interests of the country, they play a highly negative role and are considerably less patriotic and nationalist. Instead, their primary goal is the success of their own individual organization and not the accomplishment of the state (Awan, 2019).

The world has lost all respect, dignity, and fame for Pakistan as a result of media freedom. Pakistan's reputation has been severely damaged. Without a question, the press ought to be liberal and free to express and display any views they choose, but they must also remember not to compromise the state's national dignity or the interests of the country as a whole. Pakistan's media ought to contribute to the effort of restoring the nation's lost honor and dignity.

The media ought to be impartial and truthful, but rather than mocking political figures or even state governors, they ought to produce programs that are thought-provoking and grounded in reality. Rather than engaging in lightheartedness, they ought to fulfill their vital role in fostering a sense of national identity and serving the interests of the country.

The media should set an example for the rest of the world, demonstrating that the false and deceptive image of Pakistan that the international mafia is spreading against Muslim nations, particularly Pakistan, is untrue. Therefore, the Pakistani media must step upwards, fill the void, and assume duty toward this particular cause if Pakistan is to restore its respect and esteem. (Role of Media in Pakistan: Analytical Essay)

Challenges

Although Pakistani digital media is acknowledged as "Free and Independent Media," its level of freedom is not as great as it ought to be. Strong authorities can easily ban the free, transparent, and independent media from being transmitted by simply pressing one button. This procedure is continually carried out. All the national and global news channels have stopped airing. There is a threat to the media's ability to educate the country. Media employees are being threatened with consequences for failing to "Show the Truth," and restrictions are being placed on their freedom of speech. The following accusations are made against media professionals:

- Yellow journalism.
- The media does not adhere to self-regulation.
- Media outlets are attempting to compete in the rating game for numbers.
- Sensationalism in the media could be seen as liberalized.
- Several media organizations are held accountable for allegedly having ties to political parties.
- In Pakistan, the right to freedom of expression has grown contentious. (Role of Media in Pakistan: Analytical Essay).

When reporters are kidnapped and murdered while doing their official duties. Following a few days of abduction, their bodies are found in graves, and they are apprehended. When journalists are assassinated, witnesses are also killed in every city in the country. The Pakistani government mistreats journalists in public areas and conducts workplace raids and looting.

Their families face various forms of threats, and they are publicly whipped. Discriminatory behavior is encountered by female journalists. State institutions criticize the authenticity of the media by claiming that "Pakistani press is well wisher for Pakistan's adversary state (India), instead of Pakistan." The media is so prevented from speaking. When journalists expose election tampering, powerful groups kill them, and media outlets are forced to avoid hostile territory. Media equipment is damaged, and the authorities declare an emergency. The entire media landscape is controlled, and a multitude of entities, including political, ethnic, governmental, and militant, pose a cumulative threat to the media (Rehman, 2014).

Tyrants are not the only ones who suppress the media; civil authorities also serve the same purpose. In his programs, the free media of India parodies the controlled and outlawed media of Pakistan. A letter with a few phrases in the structure of "PCO" is sent, putting the media as a whole in a cage. International electronic media plays a crucial role in giving its audience access to the truth. Global media workers face challenges. Pakistan is one of the world's most hazardous and lethal countries for journalists, according to reports from international media watch. The Coalition to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) list of deceased journalists shows that covering news in Pakistan is a difficult profession.

Given the aforementioned facts, we may conclude that Pakistani electronic media has several obstacles and is not allowed to operate freely (Bashir, Shafiq, Arshad, & Bakht).

Major issues facing the media are as follows:

- There seems to be disagreement among major private TV channels on important topics, especially those pertaining to civil-military relations;
- Pakistani TV channels appear to have deliberately quit the idea of entrance maintaining, that was intended to filter out hysteria and sensationalism. The public spat among ARY and GEO reveals the powerful media companies' inherent interests.
- The flourish expansion of TV stations that prioritize ratings over objectivity and turn to sensationalism has resulted in an increase in extremist influence on the media. (Michaelsen, 2011).

- Because Pakistani journalists have no formal education to comprehend, look into, and evaluate the complicated problems related to politics, conflict, and extremism, their stories are dominated by personal biases and sensationalism.
- The biggest barrier to the media's objectivity and independence is its absence of maturity and professionalism.
- Pakistani journalists and media work in a setting where they frequently encounter a variety of internal and external dangers as well as limitations. It significantly affects how accurate the reporting is (Rehman, 2014).
- When it comes to pay and working circumstances, most Pakistani journalists have poor prospects, with the exception of a few well-known anchors and opinion writers. Since there are no dedicated funding open to reporters for study and inquiry purposes, the minimal pay and incentives do not allow room for investigative journalism.
- The appalling condition of Pakistan's educational system poses a last threat to the country's media landscape. Electronic media does not provide education of a caliber that can encourage introspection and a fair assessment of the nation's political situation (Mezzera & Sial, 2010).

Conclusion

Without a doubt, Pakistani media has contributed significantly to raising public knowledge of political issues. Beyond its flaws and shortcomings, the media is crucial to the strengthening, enlightening, and entertaining of society. Instead of fear and oppression, the state and media must coexist in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. Pakistani media is unable to ignore the trends and pressures in the world of media. Strict regulations and censorship have been applied to the media. The media as an entity needs to be given authority, overseen, and controlled on its own. Its obligations to the state and its commercial interests need to be balanced. Media can undoubtedly help improve Pakistani society if all governmental pillars are on board and operating within their respective spheres of influence. For the foreseeable future, Pakistan's media sustainability is facing serious issues and challenges. There are massive media teams, which to a certain degree even have political associations. Politics handlers in each print and broadcast industry of media teams are powerful, in politics and society.

Recommendations

Legislation is necessary in developing nations such as Pakistan to safeguard media personnel.

A code of ethics should not be viewed by the media as an infringement on their liberty and self-respect.

The 1973 guarantee of freedom of speech and expression needs to be carefully put into practice.

The extent of media reliance on the government needs to be minimized.

It is important that both public and private media support the training and education of journalists, reporters, and editors to enhance their abilities.

It is recommended that the PEMRA administration create policies that oppose sensationalism and strengthen free speech rights while staying within the bounds of the state constitution.

People should not lose hope in any situation because of the media. It shouldn't be overly critical in scope and should only highlight good things that happen. Problems need to be explored in order to identify acceptable answers that support the remaining three foundations of the state in carrying out their respective roles.

In the modern world, where the government must include the media in the process of national growth, the media also needs to comprehend the meaning of national interest. In keeping with the aims and objectives of the country, the state and media must work together harmoniously.

An institutional approach to media is required in order to unify media operations and harness their potential to produce beneficial changes in society. Establishing the Mass Communication Institute (MCI) is necessary. All individuals engaged in the editing and investigation process need to be MCI members in good standing.

National Media University ought to be founded and operationalized as soon as possible.

In order to enhance the abilities and competencies of editors, authorized people, and journalists/reporters, both the public and private press ought to be encouraged to get training and education. There aren't many opportunities to focus on developing the requisite knowledge and abilities, conducting research, preparing reports, and writing on various types and intensities of social problems. There should be more media seminars held by universities.

To show the real face of Pakistan, the government ought to support the establishment of local and even sub-regional television and radio networks that are fashioned after Al Jazeera. It will also assist in fending off the harsh criticism Islam as a faith receives. The media has a huge duty to accurately portray Islam, and this task requires understanding, discernment, and tenacity. Pakistani media needs to start a constructive religious debate.

The government must immediately adopt a thorough and cautious approach when drafting regulations limiting the media's freedom in order to uphold the media's financial independence as the cornerstone of the republican system. In order to ensure that the updated regulatory processes do not jeopardize freedom of the press and expression, it should confer with civil rights organizations, media outlets, freelance journalist associations, and opposition parties.

It is imperative that risk awareness and safety coaching be incorporated into Asian countries' media development strategies.

It is suggested that Pakistani journalism education be modernized more, with an emphasis on the organizations and individuals in the media being financially sustainable.

Encouraging the formation of a self-regulatory body can raise the bar for Pakistani media. The media ought to have a responsible, impartial, and mature stance while covering matters related to national security. Another important issue that has to be investigated is foreign funding for the media.

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