

PRESS CLUB FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURE: FROM GENERAL TO SINDH PROVINCE LEVEL IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This paper defines the concept, functions and structure of press clubs as a general and then at Sindh province level in Pakistan. It also discusses the nature of the relationship between press clubs and governments. The paper further highlights that how press clubs have grown as an international phenomenon, and what are its purposes. Moreover, the paper discusses the criteria and categories for becoming a member of press clubs. Finally, the nature, working and functioning of the press club system in Sindh province, Pakistan has been presented.

Keywords: Press club, functions of press club, press club structure, press club management

Introduction

In Sindh province, Pakistan one of the platforms for journalists to be unionized is observed in the shape of establishing a press club; where journalists are found doing their various professional activities; i.e. information seeking, sharing and newsgathering, newswriting and entertaining. In this way, the main purpose of this article was to expound the concept of press club, to highlight the functions of the press club, its structure and membership categories from general to Sindh level.

Key objectives

- 1:** This study aims to assess that for what purpose Press club culture has grown at international level
- 2:** This study aims to know about the nature and method of seeking press club membership in Sindh province

Hypotheses

In the light of above mentioned objectives following two research hypotheses were developed

H1: The main purpose of establishing any press club is to arrange leisure time activities for journalists.

H2: In Sindh province there is no hard and fast rule to be implemented fairly for seeking press club membership for novice journalists.

Press Club

A press club is defined as an organization which facilitates the meeting and sitting of the journalists on a regular basis, as they can have their growth socially and professionally. In this regard, Taketoshi (1989, p.373) adds that in America a press club is a social organization for people in journalism and they have no relationship with state agencies and the club is supported financially by the reporters. However, Trelford (2006) states that:

'press clubs came into being in different countries for different reasons. Sometimes they were formed primarily for social reasons, sometimes with a more professional-agenda and they have continued to develop in different directions, with various forms of funding, in the many countries'.

Trelford (2006) further suggests that 'press clubs should find their own way forward, according to the kind of societies in which they operate; there need be no blueprint'. In particular, pointing to the delegates who came to participate in the dinner at Stationers' Hall, London from the new democracies of Eastern Europe, and from the former Soviet

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Union, Trelford (2006) expressed his desire that he ‘wish them every success in establishing press clubs of their own’. However, simultaneously for the maintenance of credibility characteristic in journalism Trelford (2006) mentions that ‘We insist, however, that we remain non-political in a party sense’.

Relations between press club and government

Regarding development of a relationship between press clubs and governments, Trelford (2006) concludes that ‘some press clubs will be closer to governments than others. Some will be closer to business than others’. However, Trelford (2006) stipulates that ‘We insist, however, that press clubs remain non-political in a party sense’. The reason is that ‘above all, we believe in freedom of speech and freedom of expression. We believe in the promotion of professional standards, such as integrity, accuracy and honesty. We believe press clubs can encourage and develop these standards’ (Trelford, 2006).

To the contrary, however in Japan, it was found that the press clubs are permanently established as professional organizations which are offered perquisites such as rooms, equipment, and staff by major news sources within the government, important industries, and other corporate bodies (Horsley BBC correspondent in Tokyo Japan and the President of the Association of Foreign Correspondents in Japan), and the news sources in Japan give to the press clubs not only rooms but also telephones at no charge, and ministry staff to take care of the needs of the journalists. In addition, if any journalists’ reports portray the Japanese government negatively the club’s president would take action to isolate that journalist (Yamamoto, 1989). In this way, therefore, the Japanese government allows the right to obtain important information exclusively to the members of the club in Japan, and in return, or by the fear of losing their membership, the media that have their employees in the club demonstrate some restraint in criticizing their news sources (Keita, 2007).

Evolution of Press Clubs at International level

With the day by day rapid growth of media and technology the press club system is not just confined to anyone local or national entity. However, on the contrary surpassing all the geographical boundaries it has taken roots as an international phenomenon. For example, at an international level an organisation has been formed with the rubric of the International Association of Press Clubs (IAPC). This international association of media personnel came into existence in 2002 establishing its permanent General Secretariat in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, particularly with the vision to “foster dialogue, cooperation and exchange of practical experience and ideas between IAPC Members. It aims to uphold the ethics of journalism and free access and distribution of information and widen the channels of information for journalists in countries represented by the members to ultimately create a global information access network”. The IAPC has 20 member Press Clubs representing Europe, the Far East, Asia and the Middle East. The basic idea behind establishing this international platform is to weave a network for Press Clubs, Foreign Correspondents’ Clubs, and International Press Centres all over the world so “they could interact, communicate and get access to information for their member journalists in an independent and free manner” (International Association of Press Clubs, 2008).

The present members of the IAPC are: Dubai Press Club, Overseas Press Club of America, National Press Club of Australia, Berlin Press Club, Foreign Correspondent’s Club, Hong Kong, Geneva Press Club, International Press Club of Munich, London Press Club, Press Club de France, Singapore Press Club, Foreign Correspondents Association – Singapore, The Foreign Correspondent’s Club of South Asia, New Delhi and finally the European Federation of Press Clubs representing thirteen (13) European press clubs. In this way the main purpose of the IAPC is to foster dialogue, cooperation and an exchange of practical experience and ideas among all IAPC members. It also offers facilities and improves accessibility between IAPC members. The further objectives of IAPC are:

- (1) Upholding the ethics of journalism and free access and distribution of information in the spirit of prevailing constitutional charters, parliamentary resolutions and international conventions.
- (2) Broaden the availability of services and mutual advantages between IAPC members.
- (3) Develop and facilitate information exchange with political, economic, social and cultural institutions and with the world of communications across the world.
- (4) Set up links between other Press Clubs and International Press Centres particularly via the Internet.
- (5) Promote the language and culture specific to the various member countries of the International Association of Press Clubs.

In this regard, the Foreign Correspondents Press Club of Hong Kong reports that “representatives of IAPC members met to discuss ways to increase the profile of the organization and promote cooperation among international press clubs. The organization resolved to explore ways to also promote the education of young journalists around the world (International Association of Press Club, 2008). However, despite the press club culture which has taken on an international status, the situation in Japan is entirely unlike. For the mainstream newspapers in Japan, the Kisha Club (Japanese press club) system dominates the way news is gathered there. Therefore, there are two types of news conferences in Japan. First, official news conferences are chaired over by government ministries and are open to any journalist. Second, unofficial conferences are organized by the Kisha Club itself. As officials are afraid of offending the Kisha Club, if sometimes when correspondents ask questions, ‘they (officials) will say I’d like to answer that question, but I can’t because we have not told that to the Kisha Club yet. If we tell you first, they ‘would be annoyed’ (Sample, 2002, pp. 23-26).

Finally, the point to be carried out here is that if studied deeply, the press club system in each country and region will almost certainly provide different contexts and forms of the aims and objectives regarding the functioning of press clubs. However, in essence the press club is a league of journalists who share various commonalities. The press club serves as a platform to bring together media people and those who have an interest in media. Its objectives are to work for the welfare and betterment of journalists and their profession. In addition, the working relationship between press clubs and states has been found with a critical eye by academics and intellectuals and even media itself. Press clubs are founded upon the base of constitutions which require all their members follow the discipline determined in the constitution. And with the passage of time the press club culture day by day is gathering international status. However, there is a need for this journalism related phenomenon to be deeply studied, particularly, to know its latent functions and objectives and how they affect the development and standard of journalism, particularly in third world countries.

Methods

Related literature from various resources i.e. websites, and articles were taken. In this way, in the search for below referred literature, key words *press clubs* were put in google scholar search engine. Additionally, short and unstructured interviews were conducted with Government Information Officers and journalists in Sindh to collect the required data about the structure and membership criteria and categories of the press clubs in Sindh.

Manifested and latent functions of press clubs

Manifested functions

Press clubs celebrate various social and professional activities both of national and international stature during different periods of the year. For example, some activities arranged by the Singapore Press Club during the year 2003 are the launch of the club’s website and a talk on the topic ‘The Threat of Terrorism’ and the most significant event

of the year was a talk by Dr Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts. In addition to those were a talk on 'China's threat to Asia's tigers' and an annual lunch with the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore (IPRS) (Aggarwal, 2003). Moreover, during the year 2007 the high profile activities of the Singapore Press Club were a Goodwill Mission to Pakistan, in which a 35-member delegation visited the main cities of Pakistan i.e. Karachi, Rawalpindi and Lahore and more important during that visit the delegation held wide ranging discussions with the Pakistan Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Karachi and Lahore Press Clubs, Pakistan TV and the Chambers of commerce. In addition to that the Singapore Press Club invited a prominent TV personality, Riz Khan, to give an after dinner talk and Steve Forbes was also invited to give a luncheon talk (Aggarwal, 2007). However, Aggarwal (2004) also noted that there was a poor response of the club members to the social events organized by the club; on the other hand there is a good response to activities related to media professions such as talks by leading newsmakers, and that events probably had more appeal because members found them more rewarding professionally. Further, the events organised at the London Press Club are listed as lectures, exhibitions, outings, monthly drinks and quarterly grills etc. (London Press, 2010).

Finally, by visiting the websites of various press clubs and studying their activities one can conclude that as a social organization press clubs provide the following facilities and benefits for members: Bars, health club restaurants, function-rooms, banqueting, souvenirs, hotel discounts. However, as a professional organization they provide and facilitate for: tips for visiting journalists, human rights awards, photographers of the year awards, establishing press freedom committees etc. In this way the arrangements of such activities by the press clubs indicate that the press clubs are in fact both social and professional organizations. They serve as a platform not only for entertainment but also for professional development and generation of news and discussions about current issues by inviting the newsmakers to talk.

Latent functions

One significant underlying motive or functions of press clubs may be the efforts to institutionalise a press club culture. So journalists, while maintaining the relationship with governments and newsmakers, can also create a way to protect themselves and groom further the profession of journalism. This may be the case particularly in developing countries where journalism and journalists are victims of strict and draconian laws by dictatorial or civil governments. However, in the light of the account by Trelford (2006) that 'some press clubs will be closer to governments than others' it can be inferred that such press clubs which remain closer to governments possibly compromise professional journalistic standards and gain personal or union benefits.

Membership criteria and categories

Every press club has its criteria of accepting membership applications from candidates. In addition the membership categories as well vary slightly from the press club to press club. For example Japanese press clubs generally give membership to employees of newspapers that belong to the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association. In this way, they not only exclude Japan's small and medium-sized newspapers and trade papers but also large magazine companies and freelance journalists who belong to no single news medium (Yamamoto, 1989).

However, the membership of the National Press Club of Australia consists of the influencers and decision makers of Australia; be they Federal or State parliamentarians, political advisors, Government Heads of Departments, diplomatic community, academia, legal and other professions and the foundation members – journalists (National Press Club of Australia, 2008). Moreover, the membership categories of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Hong Kong are: Correspondents, those who are bona-fide members of the foreign media based in Hong Kong; journalists, those who are bona-fide journalists based in Hong Kong; Associates; and for those who are not in journalism but like to take

advantage of particularly social activities, Corporate; this is a transferable membership with certain restrictions; Diplomatic; bona-fide full-time members of the Hong Kong diplomatic corps (Foreign Correspondents Club Hong Kong, 2008).

Discipline

Press clubs have written constitutions to allow the smooth running of the clubs and the maintenance of discipline. These constitutions are generally drafted to address issues which include membership qualifications, membership criteria, membership categories, the cessation of membership, establishment of executive bodies, powers of the executive bodies, proceedings and conduct of elections, accounting and constitutional amendments, etc.

Press Club system in Sindh province, Pakistan

In the context of Sindh province, there are press clubs in all twenty three (23) administrative districts. However, the trend of establishing press clubs has not remained restricted just to the district level rather it has gone to sub-division levels. Therefore, in a majority of the sub-divisions in Sindh we can find press clubs. In Sindh, the press club is basically an association that consists of journalists who may be working for newspapers, magazines, news agencies, television channels and radio stations as reporters, photographers, cameramen, sub-editors and editors. These press clubs have been formed for the purpose not only to promote unity among journalists but also to facilitate their professional working. For instance, it is very common in Sindh that member journalists visit their press clubs on a daily basis and utilize the available facilities at press clubs for performing their professional duty in the form of dispatching their news content to their respective media outlets. Moreover, it has also become customary for common men in order to get the attention of media and bring to the notice of government their issues and problems to use the press clubs as platform or venue for public protest. Moreover, press clubs adopt formal constitutions which specify the rules, regulations and ethics governing the various aspects of the smooth running of the clubs and which is applicable to all the member journalists. Further, it is significant to notice that according to some senior journalists and Sindh Government Information Officers, all the press clubs which have been established in district headquarter cities are officially registered, recognized and to some extent are funded by the government. However, the status and condition of those press clubs at sub-divisional level are not the same thing as district headquarter press clubs.

Structure of press clubs in Sindh

Membership categories

Commonly in press clubs of Sindh membership is awarded in two categories; that are named as General and Associate.

(A) General Membership: This category includes the working journalists of the media organizations both print and broadcast. The following is the criteria for general membership in the press clubs:

1. Any media person with some years working experience in any newspaper, news agency, magazine, and radio or TV channel has the right to be a member of the press club.
2. He/ she should submit a formal application for membership.
3. He/ she should pay monthly or annual membership fees.
4. He/ she should abide by the rules and regulations of the press club.
5. Membership will be terminated if: (a) He/ she violates the rules and regulations or constitution of the club. (b) He/ she does not pay his/her fees.

(B) Associate Membership: In this category those people are made members of the press clubs who are intellectuals, ministers and senior citizens. However, associate members have no right either to vote or contest in the election of officers of the press clubs.

Table 1: Membership of the District Press clubs in Sindh

S.No.	Name of press club	Membership	S.No.	Name of press club	Membership
1.	Badin	22	13.	Mirpurkhas	22
2.	Dadu	10	14.	Naushehroferoze	23
3.	Ghotki	24	15.	Benazirabad	41
4.	Hyderabad	260	16.	Sanghar	21
5.	Jamshoro	16	17.	Shikarpur	23
6.	Jacobabad	30	18.	Sukkur	51
7.	Kambar	18	19.	TandoAllahyar	22
8.	Karachi	1100	20.	Tando M. Khan	35
9.	Kashmore	17	21.	Tharparkar	20
10.	Khairpur	30	21.	Thatta	24
11.	Larkana	30	23.	Umerkot	25
12.	Matiari	17	Total		1881

Management

Operation of the press clubs is supervised by an executive board elected by member journalists for a fixed term. Generally the executive body is comprised of the following: (a) The President, (b) Vice President, (c) Secretary, (d) Joint Secretary, (e) Treasurer and (f) executive members. In such body, the working and status of Joint Secretary is after Secretary like Vice President after President. The overall management and control of a club are vested to its executive body. The president presides over the meetings of the policymaking body and he/she has the power to supervise the working of the secretary and other office bearers. However, the secretary is in charge of doing all the business of the club. He/she will be in-charge of all office management in the office and carry out authorized correspondence with all concerned parties on behalf of the club. The table 1 gives the membership statistics of all district headquarter level press clubs in Sindh in 2008.

Separate-Group Press Clubs in Sindh

Preliminary telephone interviews reveal that in some sub-divisional and district headquarter cities more than one press club is functioning. Though they (press clubs) may possibly be working in tandem and to some extent cooperating with each other, they nevertheless exist and function separately. The main reasons for the development of these Separate-Group-Press-Clubs as expressed in preliminary interviews were that (1) when the incumbent office bearers or executive bodies of the main press clubs (District Press Clubs) breach the press club constitutions and do not conduct press club elections at the end of the board's fixed term, particularly due to their personal interests or to establish a monopoly and dominance over the press clubs, then as a result conflicting pressure or revolutionary groups develop among the member journalists of the main press clubs. (2) The second reason mentioned is that when those journalists who do not fulfil membership criteria are refused membership they form Separate-Group-Press-Clubs. However, it was stated by one Sindh Government Information Officer and a senior journalist during a preliminary telephone interview that such Separate-Group-Press-Clubs in the district headquarter cities are neither officially registered and recognized by the government nor are the members of such press clubs accredited by the Government District Information Office, nor can they avail themselves of those privileges which are enjoyed by member journalists of the main district headquarter press clubs. The membership figures for 2008 of five such Separate-Group-Press-Clubs are given in table 2.

Table 2: Membership of the Separate-Group Press Clubs in Five Districts of Sindh

S. No	Name of press club	Membership figure
1.	District Badin Aiwan Sahafat Press Club	60
2.	District Dadu National Press Club	19
3.	District Khairpur National Press Club	12
4.	District Mirpurkhas National Press Club	17
5.	District Sanghar National Press Club	13
Total		121

Non-Member Journalists

In addition to District Press Clubs (Main Press Clubs) and Separate-Group-Press-Clubs some journalists work independently without being a member of any press club. In one district (District Larkana), for example, there are about 44 journalists who are working for various media organizations, but are not members of a press club. It is very likely that such journalists who are not members of any press club may also be working in other districts of Sindh. However, the exact number of such journalists who do not form part of any press or journalistic organizations is not known.

Conclusion

Generally press clubs are organisations which facilitate both the social and professional development of journalists. Ideally, press clubs should remain non-political, but it is usually hard for them to remain detached from the political influence. With the ever growing maturity of the profession of journalism press clubs have come together as an international forum particularly in the form of the International Association of Press Clubs (IAPC) since the year 2002. Simultaneously, press club culture in Sindh province is also firmly established. There are press clubs in all twenty three administrative districts of Sindh. Moreover, though the tendency to establish press clubs to sub-division level is also continued, however these sub-division level press clubs have not yet got status equal to district headquarter press clubs. Sindh journalists use press clubs for both their professional and leisure time activities. Management of Sindh press clubs is operated by elected body of members for a fixed term. Generally, such body is consisted upon the following positions: President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer, and Executive Members. Because of differences among Sindh journalists due to various personal, vested interests, professional and ethical reasons there are Separate-Group-Press-Clubs in Sindh. However, those Separate-Group-Press-Clubs are neither registered nor officially recognized by the government like district headquarter press clubs. Additionally, there are also journalists working for diverse media organisations who are not members of any press clubs either district headquarter press club or separate-group-press-club.

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