Analyzing the Potential Role of Media in Representing Peace and Development Initiatives in Post-conflict Swat

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Abstract:

This article explores the role of media in peacebuilding and portraying peace initiatives in post-conflict Swat Valley of Pakistan. The research focuses on how the media, civil society, and government institutions collaborated in post-conflict development. Applying quantitative and qualitative approaches, the primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions from media persons, academicians, government, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) representatives, and local community activists. The findings revealed that the media impacted the ongoing peace situation and portrayed the conflict and post-conflict aspects of the society. The societal issues concerning conflict and peace were highlighted to promote peace, social cohesion, and harmony. The media collaborated with the government and NGOs which encouraged the local population to withstand against the odds. However, the community responses showed that the media played a destructive role and exploited real issues in some cases and was enforced by various conflict actors. The problems like lack of reporting training, life threats, biasness, and commercialism need to be regulated in post-conflict development.

Key Words: Swat, media, conflict, peacebuilding, post-conflict development

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts today are, in many cases, more complex and multidimensional than ever before (Betz, 2017). During 1990s, the nature of conflicts changed from direct battle to proxies (Beswick & Jackson, 2014). Most contemporary conflicts take place overwhelmingly in the world's poorer countries; Africa and Asia, accounting for the greatest number of internal conflicts in the past two decades. Instead of nurturing development, the development efforts are not only halted or damaged but actively targeted and destabilized (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). In recent years the concept of "post-conflict" has been popular in discussions of international relations, political initiatives, and peace research, but as much as it describes an unstable phase. The concept of post-conflict a new addition to post-war vocabulary and the argument that whereas it does not have any exact meaning (Betz, 2017). Post-conflict development is a situation when the conflict is over or the perpetrators are removed from the conflict region, and where peace processes are continuing through several development initiatives (Beswick & Jackson, 2014).

The peace process that follows a ceasefire, includes reconciliation, peace negotiations, monitoring, and signing of treaties between the conflicting parties. Any successful peacebuilding strategy

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inherently relies on a multi-stakeholder engagement process with a wide variety of actors (Ruggie, 2008). Those directly involved with conflict and peacebuilding are "insiders," such as the state agencies, civil society, and private businesses; and the "outsiders" representing global initiatives, international organizations including UN agencies, NGOs, and the multi-lateral lending banks. Each actor plays a unique and important role in contributing in some way to the peace process, although problems of coordination, standards, norms, or unity may create a difficult operating environment. Media interventions may be customized according to this cycle (Betz, 2017).

The media is referring to numerous mediums or channels used in an organized manner to communicate information to groups of people as a service to the public (Aster et. al, 1999). The media is composed of mass communication transmitted through a medium (channel) that simultaneously reaches a large number of people (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). The term specifically electronic media states transmission or storage media that take benefit from electronic technology. Television, radio, internet, fax, mobile, and any other medium that requires electricity or digital encoding of information are examples of electronic media (Jett, 1999). In this day and age, media holds a focal position in the general outcome of the disputes. During conflict times, generally, national media go hand-in-hand with other government institutions to win support for the war and demonize the enemy. In the case of the US, the use of the media is at its peak for promoting national interests for finest successes during the two world wars, cold war, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam invasion, and currently the war on terror (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). While in Pakistan, both the military and government used the media to advance their perspectives in the War on Terror and peace promotion (Siraj & Hussain, 2012). During the conflict in Swat, communication and information spreading mediums were mostly FM Radio, CDs, and print materials. However, in post-conflict development, TV channels have also emerged as sources of information that were connected through Cable Networks. In this study, the focus is only on electronic media i.e. Television channels and Radio in disseminating the peace development initiatives.

The role of media can be taken at two different angles; positive or negative, in a way to take a dynamic part in the conflict and rise violence otherwise in the resolving of conflict and mitigation of fierceness (Puddephatt, 2006). The type of role to be played during conflict or in the post phase of conflict situation depends upon the diverse factors of conflict and the media may be included as a strong stakeholder. An essential role media play is not just creating their judgment about the issues but to broadcast information to people about worldwide matters. The media perform its role as watchdog or gatekeeper, mirror events, and select information (Entman, 1993). The media landscape is active in Pakistan and enjoys freedom to a larger magnitude despite political pressure and direct bans from the state. The television sector experienced a media boom after media was liberalized back in 2002. Before that, there were only state-run media channels and very less population have access to global digital channels. Militants used local radio to reach out to local communities in spreading their own radical agenda.

Radio and local media run by militants in erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) involved in radicalization, hate speech, and exposure to radical agenda (International Media Support [IMS], 2009). The cohesion of the state is endangered because of violent conflict among the state and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Al-Qaeda, exaggerated intensely. It was severe fighting between Pakistani forces and militants; therefore, it

was difficult for journalists to access due to life threats given by militants. In the case of Swat, the barbaric and ruthless reign of the Taliban was highlighted by the media which forced the state to launch the military operation against the Taliban forces. After the successful military operation *Raah-e-Rast* (straight path), the federal government of Pakistan and the provincial government of KP initiated the post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and peacebuilding initiatives in close coordination with the Pakistan army in the Swat valley.

Media professionals, audience, and journalists have spoken their apprehensions that now adays media has issues in its coverage on such situations. In today's world journalism is concerned with elite importance and violent publicity (Lee & Maslog, 2005). The good picture of society is breaking up with a single negative posture portrayed on media. The government including the Pakistan army, NGOs, and other local civil societies organizations initiated several development programs for maintaining peace in the society. Media has been used in between by these organizations to portray the positive picture of the Swat valley and to review the trust of locals as well as outsiders. The focus of this study is to investigate particularly in the post-conflict Swat region that how media played a role in the post-conflict situation for peacekeeping. What kind of programmes media promoted or developed for peace promotion? How media is projecting the post-conflict coordination among stakeholders (Community, NGOs, and government departments including the army) and their development interventions planned for sustaining peace?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholars agree that media and communication channels such as the news channels, newspaper mediums, the kind of literature that is produced in the country, the kind of documentaries and movies produced in a specific situation can play an extremely important part in determining the kind of public sentiment and associated support that will be garnered in the region (Bratic & Schirch, 2007). This section highlights some theoretical aspects of the media and its potential roles in conflict escalation and sustaining peace.

Role of Media in Post Conflict

In recent years, media has emerged as a strong medium in shaping public opinion and perceptions, and for the promotion of peacebuilding initiatives in the aftermath of the armed conflict and to strengthen the relationships with the conflict-affected community in a post-conflict situation. In accordance with the liberal theory of power division in the state, mass media are assigned to act as the "fourth power" in society. They are expected to monitor the legislative, executive, and judicial powers on behalf of the public interest and to raise alarm if they detect abuse. Consequently, journalists are also expected to tackle the security sector (Reljić, 2010). According to Orgeret (2016), free independent and pluralistic media provide a platform for debate and exchange of knowledge and opinions. Simultaneously media have the potential to advance or to minimize the impact of harmful symbols in adjusting social relationships. This tendency creates an inherent conflict in the media's ability to help achieve or to hinder peaceful goals.

The current argument that media can play a role in conflict situations either as a perpetrator of conflict or as an agent for peace. The media play these roles to frame the issue and to promote its agenda-setting character (Howard, 2009). Media highlights programmes and reports specific interest of changing attitudes and behaviours away from violence and leads towards peace in post-

conflict and peace prevention period. Towards peace promotion a widespread choice of platforms and projects target to shape relationships through the lines of conflict, founding a base for open communication (Bratic & Schirch, 2007). The biases and prejudices of journalists while interpreting a conflict event is established by many researchers (Entman, 1993). Today journalism is oriented towards violence, propaganda, elite interests, and is victory oriented (Lee & Maslog, 2005). Journalists highlight the conflicts, for the simple reason that it sells. Conflicts are being sold and the victims are manipulated to bring in profits (Aslam, 2011).

Pakistani society is highly interlinked, interconnected, and interdependent. Any information from one corner of the world touches the other corner in seconds. The violent conflict with the TTP, Al Qaeda, and other militant groups on one side, and the army and state on the other, intensified dramatically during the past years; craved thousands of deaths, casualties, produced millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and lastly threatened the cohesion of the state. Radio and local media in erstwhile-FATA and KP remained involved in radicalization, hate speech, and exposure to radical agenda (IMS, 2009). The cohesion of the state was at threat because of violent conflict among the state and TTP and Al-Qaeda, which was exaggerated intensely on various media floors. Although, media coverage was difficult due to life threats given by militants and the security agencies (IMS, 2009). To gain maximum benefits there should be a healthy working environment and moral responsibilities towards reporting conflict intensification and to divert the attention of the masses for enhancing peace initiatives. It is significant to acknowledge the mixture of cultures, traditional values, and coordination in reporting peace events.

Peace journalism theory

The pioneer of using the word "Peace journalism" is Johan Galtung in 1970. Peace journalism refers to a distinctive approach, contributes to the peaceful settlement of conflicts and socially responsible journalism. It is a compromise of a more balanced point of view of war and conflict than that given by the prevailing predominant press. For example, peace journalism aims to expose less visible reasons and effects of war and violence, their cost in terms of the dead and disabled, the devastation of social order and institutes, and to build realities from all sides. Rather than highlighting what breaches conflicting events, as is common in mainstream media war coverage, peace journalism pursues to discover any potential spaces of arrangement among them (Hanitzsch, 2004).

When media plays a negative role in terms of growing the rigidities between and among the borders of the conflict, they can also play an optimistic part by endorsing peace, which is the normative idea of peace journalism (Shinar, 2007). Under the normative theory, the media ought to play a positive role when it comes to the promotion of peace. They are balanced and ethical in reporting and do not exploit or manipulate the loss and suffering. They express out against the violence or war and document suffering and damage of all sides and their reporting is to bring out people towards peace by their peaceful measures. To determine potential solutions and try to prevent further intensification are the centers of peace journalism (Himelfrab and Megan, 2008).

Media Projecting Post-conflict Situation

Conflict over controlling the media is an important dimension, whereas in a particular arena some actors compete to control or influence the media in various ways to secure or gain political

influence (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Actors who compete over the media usually assume that success in controlling access automatically leads to success in the second. In societies where the media is heavily controlled by the state or by other interest groups the result usually different. However, if media developed independently then for the developing societies this may become more difficult to put on the track. The relations between media and other state and non-state actors work in the opposite direction. Similarly, the particularities and characteristics of how media functions at a different level some implications for how a conflict played out between the primary parties in a conflict (Hussain, 2015).

Collaboration and Coordination Perspectives in Conflict and Development

The primary advantage of collaborating conflict management is that all stakeholders may be involved in the dispute resolution. Many conflicts are sometimes generated due to non-listening to each other and inclination to misunderstand the source of the other side's reasons. When everyone in a dispute expresses the totality of their concerns, it can foster understanding, empathy, and mutual respect (Quain, 2018). Although, allowing opportunities for free expression to all stakeholders in conflict with each other may diffuse hostility.

Functions of media as a collaborative agent described through the functional theory of communication which could be very useful for any attempt to construct a new framework for the analysis of media and conflict resolution. The functional theory is a classic communication theory anchored in sociological system theory, which views institutions, including the media, as performing roles designed to meet the needs of individuals and societies (Merton, 1957). Scholars have even described the functional theory as a paradigm—a master theory in control of most research in mass communication (Mcquail & Windahl, 1993).

Wright (1960) added a fourth function "entertainment" distinguished between functions and dysfunctions and constructed a framework for functional analysis. Mobilization exists in autocratic societies all the time in new nations during the nation-building phase, and in democracies in times of crisis and warfare. Mobilization may result from a governmental initiative or the media's initiative. After the September/11 terrorist attacks, for example, the American media self-mobilized and became a significant collaborating actor in the global war against terrorism . In Swat various types of collaboration worked for peace and media presented such communication and function of each organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study empooyed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Integrating qualitative and quantitative methods for this study was essential because these two modes of information improve an assessment by ensuring that the limitations of one mode of information will be adjusted by the potentials of another.

Swat valley, an administrative district of the KP was selected as a study area. Traditionally agriculture and tourism are the main sources of income of its 1.80 million people. The majority of the population are ethnic Pakhtuns, while *Syed, Mian,* and *Kohistani* also live in the area.. The study was conducted in the *Mingora, Saidusharif, Charbagh, and Kozabanda* which were famous locations during the conflict. Swat valley faced an active conflict between militants and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) during 2007-2009 and in the same period, the Swat Valley was at its apex with

repeated assaults on security forces, common people, and officials of local government. Assaults additionally focused on wrecked government structures, especially schools and health facilities (Avis, 2016). In post-conflict media portrayed the peacekeeping and development initiatives and their impacts on social cohesion and trust.

The study used purposive sampling technique, which is an effective method when only limited numbers of people can serve as a source of primary data due to research design, aims and objectives. A specific category of the population was selected, for example, media persons worked during the conflict and in post-conflict and documented the circumstances regularly. Similarly, those organizations that involved media as a source of peacebuilding were selected for detailed interviews.

A total of 55 respondents including 32 community members/activist/religious leaders, eight media persons/anchors/producers, seven government departments; police/army/PDMA officials, and eight NGO officials working in post-conflict development were interviewed. Primary data was collected through interviews. Keeping in view the sensitivity of the area, this method was found more appropriate and helpful in the secrecy of responses. Focused group discussion one each with the media persons and community members were held to get thorough information and to authenticate the individual data on multi-aspects of the conflict and peace. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software i.e. MS Excel while for qualitative textual, the data was divided into different themes mentioned in objectives and interpreted accordingly. Ethical considerations regarding respondents and their responses have been kept as per publication guidelines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In today's world media has emerged as a strong medium in shaping public opinion, perceptions, and the promotion of peace sustaining initiatives in the aftermath of the armed conflict and military operation in order to strengthen the relationship with the affected community. The media act as a strong weapon to mold the behaviours of the communities towards radicalization or vice versa. The first part discusses the perception of respondents about media and what types of media sources were functioning in the study area.

Sources of Media and Information

The basic source of information are print and electronic media through which information is reached about the existing scenarios inside and outside the Swat valley. Both print and electronic media specifically highlighted the issues of conflicts and raised the voice of the masses to concerns.

The respondents agreed that before conflict the main source of information was radio and newspapers. Mostly people used to listen to the radio on regular basis to get informed about the militants' activities, however, after the conflict they had access to state-run Urdu TV channels and Pashto radio programmes. A varied range of programs such as entertainment shows on TV, dramas and army anthem videos, national songs, and religious teaching were presented. Some informative shows, for example, documentaries, TV programmes with peace messages include drama serial *Wilco, Faseel-e-Jaan se Aagey,* and the radio show *Sabawoon* were highly appreciated by the local population.
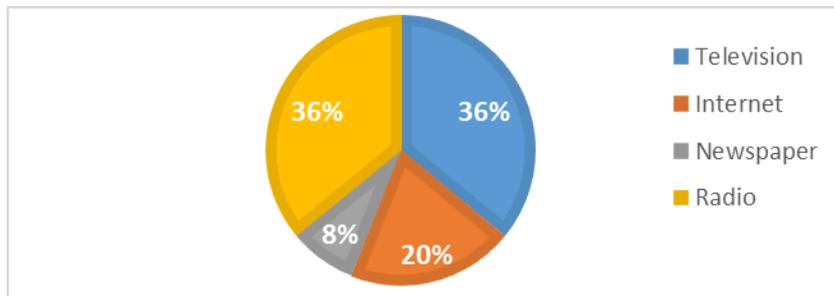
Figure: 1 Major Sources of Information in Swat valley

Figure1 illustrates that 56 percent of the respondents are of the view they rely on the television and radio as a medium of information while 31 percent believe in the internet including social media as a source of information where young generation is more attached. The rest of 12 percent view newspapers and magazines as important sources of information. The majority of them are regular customers of the newspapers.

State-run and Militant run Media

Militant run media is the term introduced during data collection. Between 2006 and 2009 militants effectively used mobile radio (FM radio) transmitters assembled on pickup trucks to on-air their speeches in Swat. The militant media was controlled and operated by the insurgents in various parts of the study area. They used both print and electronic media which includes internet, radio, CDs, printed reading materials like brochures, pamphlets, and weekly magazines. Its agenda and policy were to influence the public with their narratives and adore their narratives among the masses. According to one female teacher in Mingora:

> Taliban used radio to control the public particularly women through conveying messages about the rights of women. Women's of our area liked the sermons broadcasted through radio during the Taliban's times because they spoke about women's issues and rights granted by Islam. They were highlighting problems such as domestic violence, disowning of property rights, and encourage men to give women their rights. (Personal communication, Apr. 21, 2018).

At that time the government of Pakistan didn't take any precautionary or proactive measures to curb this initial radicalization as no parallel channel/medium was launched by the government to divert people's attention.

After military operations in 2009, the Pakistan army and civil government institutions established a radio station (FM-96) in Swat as well as other state-owned radio and TV stations including cable networks to disseminate counter-narrative to the TTP's propaganda. State media remained often more functional during and post-conflict times. The initiatives taken for peace promotion either developmental or rehabilitation by the government and civil society were well presented on these channels that were effective to mold the society towards deradicalization and move towards peace. According to respondents, this media favored and glorified government interventions and peace sustaining creativities, such initiatives helped in the engaging community for the promotion of social cohesion and interaction of state actors and society.

Respondents have different views regarding the media. To categorize these responses into two broad categories some views are in favour of media and some are having anti-media based on their knowledge and experience. According to a Swat based journalist:

> Media act as a bridge between government and society, the mature and constructive approach can raise a healthy and peaceful society. Media can project and highlights the issue of conflicting society and transform these societies into peace by projecting the soft image in a controlled and positive way. (Personal communication, Apr. 22, 2018)

In contrast to pro-media interventionists, some of the respondents in the study area are against media interventions in society and considered it as exploitative. A community activist at village Koza Banda stated:

> Media is *FASAD*, destroying the social fabrics of society and doesn't present the actual picture of society. The only fear was spread during the conflict. Small issues portrayed big. For example, a small flood hit the area, the media highlighted it as it ruins the whole Swat, this reporting story the media had a devastating effect on the tourism industry during and post-conflict case. (Perosnal communication, Apr. 21, 2018)

Projection of post-conflict scenario of Swat

After the successful completion of the military operation namely *Raah-e-Raast* (straight path) in 2009, the federal and provincial governments with the coordination of Pakistan army and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) started post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and peace sustaining initiatives. The media projection played a significant role in the promotion of peace and emerged as a main stakeholder in the process.

The respondents agreed that at the time of conflict media focused on reporting all the incidents that occurred during the TTP's long period of conflict both in newspapers and TV channels. The media was an actual informer at the time of conflict and information reached the community only through this platform. The general public was quite well aware of what was going on around them. The rehabilitation and resettlement phases were considered the contributing elements to mold the behaviours and attitudes of the people. The media was given the role to highlight the conflicting and post conflicting situations in a controlled way. A government official told that the media gave courage to the people to sustain themselves in that difficult situation of conflict, and flood disaster and motivated towards peace. Government organizations and NGOs also used this platform to represent their initiatives. Some of these initiatives in post-conflict were taken by the government as it was the main stakeholder. The prime initiative taken by the state was to project the real face of Islam on print and electronic media specifically radio through the real interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah which was propagated by the extremists in the area. Examples of such visions were Saboon De-radicalization centers and Mishal De-Radicalization programmes.

Some of the prominent peace programmes included; dramas, telefilms, national songs, and other related materials that were continuously broadcasted. The drama serial *Faseele-Jan say Aagay* (Unbeatable Spirits, Immortal Souls), which was aired on Pakistan Television (PTV) and highlighted the sacrifices rendered by the armed forces while fighting against the TTP and safeguarding the lives of people of Pakistan. Several programmes on Pakistan Radio and FM 96, including *Da-*

Pakhtoon Hawa Sahar (Pakhtoon Early Morning Breeze), *Aksoona* (Picture) and *Sabawoon* (Dawn), *Khuda Zameen se Gya Nahain* (God has not gone from land) were also broadcasted and liked by the local population. The young respondents who have access to TV and Cable network appraised such peace promotion programmes in term of molding the behaviours, attitude, and cognition of the people towards peace, and considered these programmes as quite helpful in reducing tensions and stress from the minds of the affected population. According to Cable network head at Mingora city:

> At the time of conflict cable network was stopped, whereas only sports and news channels were allowed to broadcast. Taliban did not use cable TV but only used radio for conveying their messages and promotions. After the conflict, armed forces restored these networks and new cable networks were established. In the post-conflict, some of the channels on cable network were used by security agencies for portraying peace initiatives and peace promotion programs. (Personal communication, Apr. 23, 2018)

The government departments along with the support of NGOs and foreign embassies initiated the summer and winter sports festivals in Swat valley to present the positive face of the area and revive the trust of the people. The first sports festival was conducted in *Malam Jabba* with the title, "Spirit of Swat" in 2009. Later on, "Swat Summer Sports festival," "Swat Tourism Gala," and "Kalam festival" made a proper space on the media channels. These annual sports festivals along with Skiing games in Malam Jaba contributed a lot to present the positive image of the Swat valley and attracted both national and international tourists. The activists and academic respondents viewed that the sports festivals regularly aired on national media channels revived the trust of local and outsider population in government agencies for maintaining security and peace in the region.

Media and Promotion of Peace

According to respondents, an intermediate role was played by media to promote peace through awareness raising activities of external and internal factors continuously. This platform is reached to every person and people aware of the positives and negatives of society. The observation reveals that violent activities and conflict issues were properly reported, and problems of society were highlighted significantly to the public. People outside the Swat were aware of the circumstances and distinguished the actual scenario of the post-conflict. Information publishes in media was seriously censored and developed to promote the positive and soft image of society.
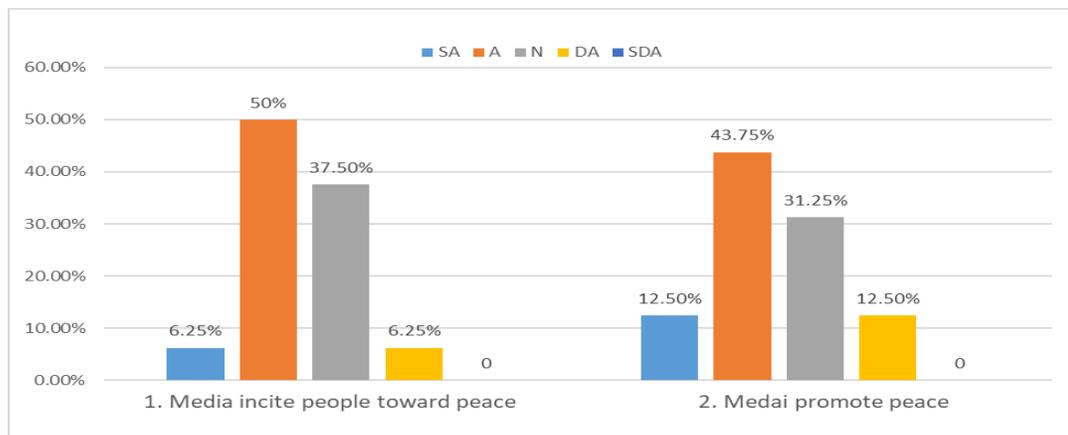

Figure 2: Perception of respondents about media role towards peace

The figure depicts the response of the statements asked by the responders, media motivates incite people towards peace and media promotes peace. Almost 50 percent of the respondents agreed with both the statements and no one among the respondents who opted for strongly disagree with these statements. 37 percent and 31 percent stayed neutral to this statement. Although 6-12 percent of the respondents disagreed proposing their negative perception of media.

Government and NGOs significantly used media for their peace sustaining initiatives and ongoing development projects of the community. Participatory development plans were initiated to mold the behaviours towards people towards deradicalization. Recommendations and suggestions were also taken by the media to promote a positive picture of society. NGOs invited media persons, trained them in making documentaries, field exposures, awareness sessions, first aid, and advisory activities to protect themselves while reporting in conflict and post-conflict situations. Armed forces took media persons to conflicting areas to observe and portray the ongoing situations of de-escalation and rehabilitation activities. According to journalists, "the early resolution of the conflict in Swat is because of access provided to media persons. Incidents reported on media put pressure on the state actors to take necessary measures to curtail the propaganda campaign and promote a soft image that was found quite helpful in settling peace early." Academia supported the argument that at crucial period journalism can shape and spread values, calm tensions, and counter hate-speech, providing an array of different views and opinions. But this depends on when the media plays a key role in positive social and political transformations.

On the other hand, media access to conflict areas of erstwhile-FATA was strictly controlled, which prolonged the peace process and resettlement of the IDPs. Although the context and situation of erstwhile-FATA were different than Swat, and the conflict dimensions are different. However, the core factor to the immediate resolution and the management of the conflict is media access to conflict-affected areas. Therefore, peace journalism theory is practically helpful in the promotion of peace and transformation of conflict to peace.

Coordination between Government, NGOs, and Media

During the conflict, the primary goal of the stakeholders was to stop the violence as soon as possible and to develop strong collaboration between different actors involved in post-conflict development. There were collaboration and coordination among the government departments, NGOs, and media. All these stakeholders are interdependent and equally responsible for playing their roles in the resolution of conflict.

The government used the media frequently to portray peace sustaining initiatives for the general public both inside and outside the country. The purpose was to mobilize and aware of the communities on the destructions of the armed conflicts in the area. The voice of the government was only shared through this medium and the government departments were made obligatory to preserve and implement for promotion of peace in Swat.

Community Engagement Plan was launched by the district government of Swat in which members of Dispute Resolution Council (DRC's), police, local elite, Village Development Committee (VDC) members, and media persons were engaged. A local print media person said that in every challenging situation during post-conflict all the members were called, and subject matters were discussed. Recommendations were taken and a consensus was developed to solve the problems.

These plans were effective due to the participation of all stakeholders and produced a sense of ownership to own the common problem and provided opportunities to each other for finding solutions.

According to a government official at the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) office:

> Collaboration existed between government and media both in conflict and after conflict. The launching of anti-mullah radio was a collaborative effort to curb the violence and mold the radicalized ones towards deradicalization and broadcast public service messages for the promotion of peace. Specific programmes like *Da-Pakhtoon, Hawa, Sabawoon* were on aired and the teachings of Islam were delivered regarding tolerance and devotion for the peace by the state-run media. Similar law enforcement agencies launched recreational programmes as counter-terrorism activities. (Personal communication, Jun. 28, 2018)

Media, NGOs, and Local Civil Society

Society and media are dependent on each other. Media channels run on the demand of the public and the public rely on the information provided by these channels. National and NGOs in collaboration with local civil society groups organized several advocacy campaigns to overcome the radicalization and published the contents in local and some national media channels. *LASOONA,* a Swat based NGOimplementing a European Union aid project titled "Enabled Environment for Right based approach, inclusive development, and improved governance" to boost the role of civil society organizations to improve the local governance structures. The organization conducted various seminars, conferences workshops, and training for the promotion of peace in Swat. An official from *LASOONA* told that we actively engaged print and electronic media to promote the role of civil society groups in the implementation of development interventions and sustaining peace and to aware the communities about various developmental initiatives.

SWAT Youth Front (SWF) played an effective role in the mobilization of youth for the promotion of peace. SWF competed the "Youth Action for Governance and Democracy" project which engaged activists in the training of youth for social harmony, cohesion, and peacebuilding. This organization put its effort into the revival of indigenous cultural heritage. The youth was given free *rubab (music)* classes, hold poetry and music sessions in different places of Swat, and conducted culture exchange field visits, whereas the local media was given a due space for coverage of such activities. A SWF representative told that we invited media persons and local journalists in our workshops and training, to highlight and project our initiatives for peace to the general public. The media encourages people and empower the marginalized to become aware of their rights.

The dual function of the involvement of media was to revive the trust of the local people in NGOs, which was highly deteriorated during the Taliban era. In post-development, awareness through media about NGOs activities motivated local communities to work with NGOs and get the benefits of economic and physical infrastructure improvement. Seminars organized by NGOs were well presented in media that further motivated the youth to participate in social, economic, and political activities.

Problems and Issues for Media in Reporting

The respondents used the term embedded journalism, which means the restriction of presenting facts due to the sensitivity of the issues. This embedded journalism existed at the time of conflict

and post-conflict period in Swat and still exists in the newly merged districts of KP. The concept of embedded journalism is present generally in Pakistan over the last decade where the military establishment and the militants restricted accessibility of journalists to conflict zones due to issues of journalists' safety and hence assumed control of conflict-sensitive reporting. This term is related to the proverb, "Might is Right." According to a journalist, "media favours the Taliban during the time of their power and presented the Taliban interventions in the society, and when the military took over media favoured military and government interventions." Selected groups of journalists are taken to the militancy-hit areas where they work and then report in a controlled environment.

During group discussion with journalists, it was revealed that they faced serious life threats due to their challenging and sensitive work nature. Several journalists lost their lives during the wave of terrorism. According to estimates, 72 journalists lost their lives and 56 were injured between 2002 and 2017. The majority of journalists received life threats and some of them became the victim of murder attempts. These threats hamper the accuracy of the reporting and ruin the investigative journalism. On the other hand, journalists were bound to portray the interest of powerful either state or non-state actors. In such an environment how one can expect media persons to portray the news are honest. The race for breaking news and rating battle ruins the journalists' capacity to portray the soft images of the society. The reporting of journalists from both print and electronic media reelects sensationalism and personal bias which may be due to incompetence in their professional and academic expertise. Community respondents realized that local media in Swat utilizes societal and psychological tendencies to sell their news.

The basic challenge according to government and media respondents that there are no policy guidelines for the media persons to work in conflict and post-conflict development zones. The media is becoming a source of social and political unrest due to its own "event-driven" approaches. The media person decides what he considers better without consulting proper guidelines or policy measures. Lack of professionalism and lower professional education levels of journalists are the root cause for not paying attention to a proper work order. The media sells news and this selling depends upon the ratings. According to one journalist during conflict times there was a varying percentage for the videos of conflict areas. A video was sold to national and international channels and the rate of a video was up to $500/- depending upon the content. Media houses depend upon the business they generate from the commercials.

A journalist in Peshawar told:

> It is our social responsibility to play a role of mediator in conflict resolution but if we run a programme on peace development, suddenly a big news e.g. Nawaz sharif's disqualification is on media then who is going to watch that peace programme. So we need to change the topic because of the demand of the society. Our channels are running on growing ratings. (personal Communication, Jun. 28, 2018)

CONCLUSION

During the conflict scenario in Swat Valley, the media instruments were used as a strong medium for the promotion of radicalization while in post-conflict the same type of media contributed to sustaining peace initiatives. This research focused on how media played its role in the promotion of peace and deradicalization in the post-conflict development of Swat valley. The media supported

government intervention, NGOs development activities, and informal institutions efforts and was successful to promote peace in Swat. The real issues of society were highlighted to convey the messages to government agencies to develop proper strategies and promote social cohesion and harmony. Media collaborated with civil society groups, government, and NGOs and acted as a bridge between governments and the community for the resolution of the conflict, which encouraged local people to withstand the odds.

The media broadcasted a series of its peace and deradicalization programmes in the post-conflict development era, however, the media and their workers faced serious problems during and after the conflict such as lack of professionalism and skilled training in reporting. Weak investigative journalism was carried out and only "powerful say was presented." The perceptions of the local population about media role were found as destructive and exploitative. The portray of some issues was not the actual incidents as ground realities were ignored. Therefore, portraying small as big ruins the social, political, and economic atmosphere of the Swat. Journalism to some extent was found to earn money through selling their news and run for rating. Proper guidelines for media and their working in conflict and the post-conflict situation may be developed and training may be imparted to the journalists before sending them to sensitive areas.

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