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Code of ethics for electronic media in Pakistan

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Abstract. “Who will watch the watchdog” This phrase became popular in Pakistan when Geo, one of Pakistan's most-watched television news channels in Pakistan, has many times violated codes of ethics that were proposed by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) (Pakistan Voice, 2012, p. 2-6). Media plays an important role in our daily lives, as its basic function is to inform, educate and entertain. Today's world media is getting more and more power because it plays a role of watchdog on politicians, governments, judiciary and our actions and can quickly inform masses and disseminate information across the globe. Therefore, freedom of media is very essential if it plays a constructive and significant role for people living in a democratic country like Pakistan. But if the press itself is not free then how can it play a constructive role or can raise voice for the rights of the citizens. Edmund Burke (1787) stated that media is the fourth-pillar of the state. He termed it fourth-pillar because of its constructive role in our lives, the press or media can only perform its sacred duties of the fourth estate if it is free and independent in covering different aspects of life, whether it is politics, education, health, religion, war zone or any other important topics. Most importantly, it is only possible if the job is done professionally, ethically and with full responsibility.

Keywords. Code of ethics, electronic media, Pakistan

1. Introduction

“Who will watch the watchdog” This phrase became popular in Pakistan when Geo, one of Pakistan's most-watched television news channels in Pakistan, has many times violated codes of ethics that were proposed by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) (Pakistan Voice, 2012, p. 2-6). Media plays an important role in our daily lives, as its basic function is to inform, educate and entertain. Today's world media is getting more and more power because it plays a role of watchdog on politicians, governments, judiciary and our actions and can quickly inform masses and disseminate information across the globe. Therefore, freedom of media is very essential if it plays a constructive and significant role for people living in a democratic country like Pakistan. But if the press itself is not free then how can it play a constructive role or can raise voice for the rights of the citizens. Edmund Burke (1787) stated that media is the fourth-pillar of the state. He termed it fourth-pillar because of its constructive role in our lives, the press or media can only perform its sacred duties of the fourth estate if it is free and independent in covering different aspects of life, whether it is politics, education, health, religion, war zone or any other important topics. Most importantly, it is only possible if the job is done professionally, ethically and with full responsibility.

This paper aims to deal with one analytical major question that up to what extent Pakistan's television channels are violating these basic codes of ethics that are truthfulness, fairness, accuracy and accountability? This research paper is an initiative to briefly, precisely and clearly define and analyze the practice of basic codes of ethics with recent examples from the most popular Pakistani news channels including Geo News, Express News and Samma News. In order to answer this question, this paper will also discuss some proposed codes of ethics by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and Geo News. This paper considers a variety of existing secondary literature as sources to answer the proposed research question. The method of analysis of choice will be descriptive and explanatory. For the purpose, different books, journals, research articles and existence literature will be consulted. Following the main components of Social Responsibility Theory that will generate an interesting debate to develop a deep understanding on the topic and get good results in conclusion.

There is a substantial body of research regarding code of ethics but it seems that there is very little analysis and literature available on codes of ethics practiced in Pakistan's electronic media. Existence literature focused on freedom of press, laws for Press in Pakistan's constitution and general code of ethics. Raza (2013) suggests various laws and code of ethics are necessary for the regulation of mass media in Pakistan. His research work shows the importance of following codes of ethics to ensure press freedom in democratic countries like Pakistan. Sidra (2012) acknowledges that "more freedom stresses to act more responsibly" referring to this we can understand the importance of media ethics which are considered as important guidelines for both journalists and media institutions. Abbas (2011) calls for strict code of ethics to safeguard journalists, media institutions and public. In his research work, he termed Pakistan as the most dangerous place for journalists and hold responsible media institution for not ensuring codes of ethics. There are number of other publications that are mainly focused on press freedom and showing codes of ethics as one of the big hurdle in its way.

My intro will be followed by conceptual framework: social responsibility theory, a brief introduction to code of ethics, media landscape of Pakistan, emergence of electronic media after 9/11, analysis of media in light of these codes of ethics that are truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, objectivity and minimize harm followed by analysis of Pakistani news channels in light of proposed ethics of PEMRA. As a result of the above outline structural arguments, the paper is divided into two major sections. In the first section the focus shifts towards the conceptual framework of social responsibility theory and its main components, while the second section clearly define and analyze on ground situation of electronic media in Pakistan and implementation of basic codes of ethics with recent examples from top Pakistan's news channels i.e. Geo News, Express News and Samma News. And the last part ends with a brief conclusion of the above outlined arguments followed by publication bibliography.

2. Conceptual Framework: Social Responsibility Theory

The conceptual and theoretical framework was derived from social responsibility theory. Frederick S Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm (Siebert, 1956) has introduced *Social Responsibility Theory* in their work of four theories of the press. These four theories are known as normative theories namely, *Authoritarian*, *Libertarian*, *Communist and Social Responsibility Theory* that has helped to clarify the relationship between mass media and the political society in the modern world.

Social responsibility theory is an ethical framework and suggests that an entity, be it an organization or individual, has no obligation to act for the benefit of society at large. In mid-

20th century most of the developing countries and third world nations have used this social responsibility theory of press which is associated with “the Commission of the Freedom of Press” in United States at 1949. In the book “Four theories of Press” (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956)

Social responsibility theory suggests code of ethics for regulation of media to ensure responsible journalism and media channels works in the larger interest of public and society. According to this theory media should follow certain codes of ethics to develop standard in Journalism. And if any journalist or media organization violates the proposed codes of ethics then there should be penalties for them. Furthermore this theory makes journalists and TV channels accountable for their actions if it harms society in any form.

2.2 The philosophy of Social Responsibility:

This theory is an extension of the libertarian philosophy and it says that media should recognize its major responsibility to resolve conflict through discussion to promote public opinion and important social interest. This theory put some obligations on press freedom. It put some responsibilities on the shoulders of journalists and media institutions to work in the best interest of the society. Media should be responsible and accountable to public as media is one of the most important social institutions. It further says that if media is not playing its role with responsibility then agency of public or government should enforce it. “This theory led to the establishment of Press Councils, drawing up of Codes of Ethics and anti-monopoly laws in many countries” (Ravi, 2012, p.307)

For the purpose to ensure accountability of media institutions or journalists, “every mass media group has its own code of ethics which aims at guiding its staff the oldest, shortest and broadest of the codes is the Canons of Journalism, adopted by the American society of Newspaper Editors in 1923” (Sandman, 1976). It has recommendations for all media institutions to practice responsibility to the general welfare, accuracy and truthfulness, fairness and impartiality, no harm to individual’s privacy and accountability, sincerity, decency. (Uzuegbunam, 2013, p.3). According to Bittner (1989) it does not mean that press could not be able to criticize government or private institutions but there must be evidence or proof and reports should be presented with balance and responsibility to maintain stability in the society.

Major Features of Social Responsibility Theory:

Dennis McQuail (1994) illustrates the principles of Social Responsibility Theory;

- I. Media should follow and ensure agreed codes of ethics and professional standards.
- II. Media institutions should be completely free of any pressure but it must be self-regulated.
- III. Media organizations should be fair, accurate, truthful, impartial and relevant.
- IV. The media have some obligations to society, and media ownership is the public trust.
- V. Under some circumstances, society may need to intervene in the public interest.
- VI. News media should provide a platform for ideas and open debate

In light of the above-mentioned principles, we can analyze the Pakistan’s mainstream media role. But before entering into the analysis section, we must briefly define codes of ethics in regards to media followed by the media landscape of Pakistan.

2.3 A brief introduction to code of ethics:

Generally codes of ethics refer to guidelines for the employees or workers working in any organization or company. These are principles or standards which govern our behavior and this way it is believed that one can run or operate an organization smoothly. These guidelines, rules, principles are set by societies, organizations, religious groups, rulers and governments etc.

Each and every institution is working under certain code of ethics and laws. Media or press code of ethics has long been a subject of public discussion. Some experts are of the view that media can be operated only within the ethical framework, while on the other hand, some experts are completely disagreed with this view, though they say that no media institution can exist very long until or unless they ensure public confidence and that requires objective, fair, balance and accurate reporting (Riaz, 2013, p. 307). According to Christopher (1997) it does not mean that if some media institutions exist so they can be always neutral, responsible, fair or reliable or all of them share same values or ethical standard.

3. Analysis: Media Landscape of Pakistan: (2002-2017)

Media in Pakistan provides information and entertainment through television, newspaper, radio and Cinemas. Pakistan has a vibrant media landscape; among the most dynamic in South Asia. According to Pakistan Press Foundation, there are approximately four million circulations of newspapers in Pakistan. Among Urdu Press, Jang daily Urdu is considered the largest newspaper followed by Nawai-e-Waqt and Express daily Urdu, whereas among English Press, Dawn, The News International, Express Tribune and The Frontier Post are the most popular and are most circulated English dailies in Pakistan. Poor literacy rate in rural areas, high prices of newspapers, number of private owned TV news channels are the detrimental factors of low circulation. The circulation of newspaper per capita in Pakistan is among the lowest in the world (Pakistan Press foundation, 2006, p. 2-6).

The Pakistani media landscape reflects a multi linguistic, multi ethnic and class divided society. There is a clear divide between English and Urdu Press. The Urdu media, particularly the newspapers, are widely read by the masses mostly in rural areas and the lower and middle class of the society. Whereas the English Press is urban and elite centric and is more liberal and professional opinion makers, politicians, the business community and the upper class of society.

The elite class of the society and major cities of Pakistan, such as, Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi get more media coverage as compare to other cities like Peshawar or Quetta and rural areas of Pakistan. As it is a popular phrase in Journalism that “Big people make big news”. The upper-middle class is overrepresented than the middle and lower-middle class on television. Also in dramas and entertainment program some ethnic groups are portrayed stereotypes, such as, Pathan as servant and Tribesmen as Terrorists. Most often women are shown in inferior capacity such as, male doctor and female nurse. (Siraj, 2009, p.5)

Pakistani Tv channels are completely dependent on advertisements from government sectors and other big private manufacturers and organizations. Advertisements are the only income of media channels in Pakistan. Due to this reason, these organizations and government sometimes control the media content especially news related to state institutions. They can also use media as a propaganda tool for their personal interests rather than national interests. This is one of big reason, that media in Pakistan perform very little function of watch dog journalism.

The major topics of discussion in Pakistani media is news about Government conflicts and disagreements, government decisions, scandals, protests violence, disasters, political rivalry, Pakistan’s mainstream media covers mostly stories related to violence such as

terrorism, murder, fraud, drug, robbery. There is always a big competition between private Tv channels for breaking news, they are running after breaking news to increase their Television rating points (TRPs). In fact Journalism is a sacred profession but it becomes more like a business in Pakistan. Recently it is noted that media education is gaining grounds in Pakistan. After 9/11 many universities offered degrees in Journalism and Mass Communication. Before that most of the journalists in electronic media were not journalism degree holders. Now the situation is the other way round. The education of journalist has brought considerable change in the content presentation and sociology of the media in the country (Shakeela, 2005, p. 4-8)

3.1 After 9/11 the emergence of electronic media under rule of Dictator Pervez Musharraf:

Since 2002, the Pakistani media has become powerful and independent and the numbers of private channels have grown from just three state-run channels in 2000 to 89 in 2012 (PEMRA, 2010, p.10-15). Most of the private media channels in Pakistan flourished under a military dictator Musharraf regime. After 9/11 dozens of private TV channels and newspapers emerged in Pakistan. The main purpose of allowing and issuing licenses to dozens of channels was to ensure that media is free in Pakistan and they can debate any relevant issue they are faced with and this way we can end communication gap between government and public but still these channels and newspapers remained under high influence of politicians and military. (Siraj, 2009, p. 2)

In recent years a dramatic increase has been recorded in the number of Urdu Tv channels, however, journalists lack basic knowledge of technical, professional skills, ethical journalism to cover diverse range of complex issues affecting their communities such as terrorism, law and order, security, education and health in rural areas of Pakistan. (The Pakistan Press Foundation, 2016, p. 11)

3.2 Analysis of media coverage in light of these codes of ethics with recent examples taken from Geo News, Express News, ARY News and SAMMA News:

Freedom of press should not be used as a license to create chaos or conflict in the country. There should be some set of professional standards which need to be followed by media persons or journalist to pass the message with full responsibility. It is one of the important responsibilities of media to respect the right of the people who are involved in the news; it should exercise its freedom in a standard and decent ways to ensure peace and prosperity in the region. It is duty of the press to gather information and pass it to public with objectivity and enable them to make judgments on the current issues. Media should be accountable to public for the truthfulness, accuracy and fairness of its news. The issues of ethics not only affect mass communication but everyone in public life. The major goal of all news stations are to serve all citizens well (Bertand, 2002, p. 3)

Although there are several aspects of media ethics, however, in this research study we opted for five very basic and important codes of ethics to know that whether these are followed and practiced by TV news channels in Pakistan or not. According to *Social Responsibility Theory* and *US Freedom Press Commission*, these are very basic and universal code of ethics to be followed by media organizations. These are truth and accuracy, fairness and impartiality, humanity and accountability, these all are purposed to minimize harm in the society. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has proposed these basic codes of ethics but due to some hurdles created by pressure groups, government and military, they are not practiced.

I. Truth and Accuracy:

The first and foremost duties of TV news channels are to ensure truth and verify news reports before broadcasting them to the audience or viewers. All Pakistani TV channels and PEMRA considers truthfulness as the main ethical principle. Many times when Pakistani televisions are in race to get the credit of first breaking news, they do not go for verification of the news and make a news report based on their own assumptions. This kind of unverified reports spread fear and panic in society and people always remain in doubt. One of research article quoted the example of a news report about a plane crash shown on Pakistani TV channels. On April 20, 2012 when a passenger plane of *Boja Airline* was crashed in which 127 persons were killed while approaching Islamabad, one of the major Pakistanis news channel *Express News* has started off its coverage of the incident by telling viewers that it was a "helicopter" crash. After a while they changed their report and called it the tragedy of an "army aircraft" and a "cargo plane" in quick succession, all apparently based on assumptions and unverified reports" (Ghani, 2016, p.21)

Journalism is a sacred profession and journalists need to come up with accurate reporting before appearing on TV screens. Pakistani news channels are in hurry to present news to public and get appreciation from viewers. Usually in this kind of situations, journalists are compelled to present or broadcast inaccurate news reports. In a recent example of PK-661 passengers plane crash in Pakistan, all the major news channels, Geo News, Express News and Samma News were showing tickers and continuously telling that this information is not accurate but according to sources these are some of the reasons that led to the plane crash, and the sources were also not mentioned to the viewers (Tanveer, 2016, p.4-5)

It is an important responsibility of journalists and TV channels to verify news from authentic sources and not to distort news reports. Also media channels should not scarify the accuracy of news while they are in hurry and in race with other channels (Shamsi, 2005, p.309)

It is obvious to people in Pakistan that TV news channels are resorting to inaccurate reporting, breaking news, sensationalism and exaggeration in the absence of concrete analysis and authentic sources. It clearly shows that social responsibility is not performed by media channels in such situations.

II. Fairness and Impartiality:

It is duty of every media organization and TV channel to represent society as a whole and ensure equal coverage to all groups or parties in the society. Media need to show both sides of the pictures as media ethics requires a balanced coverage to all important aspect of the society. (Arshad, 2015, p.6) acknowledges that there are some important areas which are ignored and not given proper coverage. Most of studies find that Pakistan"s Tv channels have largely ignored entrepreneurship development, cultural diversity, corruption and social problems of religious minorities, which is very important for a multicultural and multiethnic country like Pakistan. In a survey, it was found that one of the most popular channels Geo News has given a very little coverage to highlight the social issues of minorities in Pakistan (Ashraf, 2016, p.6)

However, Geo News mentioned in its own code of ethics (known as Geo Asool) section „F“ claims that:

“We aim to be fair and open-minded and it is our goal to reflect all significant strands of opinion by exploring the range and conflict of views. We will be objective and even handed and will always strive for balance and present diverse point of view even when the majority may be averse to the minority point of view.” (Geo Asool, 2012, section, 4)

This clearly shows that the codes of ethics are limited only to their papers. Its implementation is still a far cry in Pakistan. One of the research study revealed that in Pakistan, „Big people make big news“ television channels give coverage to people who most prominent or celebrities and completely ignores people who are less prominent or poor people living in rural areas. Another scholar found that “Powerful people can kill or steer news stories” (Bertand, 2002, P.1). All the prominent TV channels including Geo News, Express News, Samma News and Ary News have proved the mouthpiece and propaganda tools of elite and ruling class. Political and social problems of poor provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan has been ignored (Eijaz, 2012, p.7)

On April, 01, 2011, the guardian has reported that Pakistani media channels are not giving coverage to an “epic killing spree” that is happening this week in Pakistan’s largest province Balochistan. While Amnesty International has mentioned that more than 100 dead bodies were found in Balochistan which was completely ignored by news channels (Smith, 2011, p.7)

It is one of the most important responsibilities of media channels to remain neutral in its news, views and cover events without adding their own taste or opinion. “Objectivity has always been touted as the golden rule of journalism” (Khwaja, 2011, p.1)

III. Humanity:

These all code of ethics is supposed to minimize harm in society. It is the duty of journalist to educate, inform and entertain masses but with responsibility and not to create chaos and disturbance in masses. But sometimes media channels in Pakistan do not care about their reports which directly or indirectly harm and affect people in society. “Entertainment channels had also started showing programs which clearly violate PEMRA’s code of conduct, by showing violence, pornographic content, dead bodies, rape, and sex re-enactment” (Ayesha, 2016, p.8). Most of the time when new channels are covering casualties in bomb blasts, war zones or other incidents; they are showing blood and dead bodies which can have very bad effects on children and traumatized people. For instance, when Boja Airline was crashed in Rawalpindi on 20 April, 2012, Pakistani top channels were busy in showing dead bodies carelessly “In a shoddy attempt to display compassion and emotion, the reporting of the air crash was accompanied by melodramatic tunes in the background on various channels and sudden images of limbs and blood sans discretionary warnings.”(Kasana, 2012, p. 3-7). In such a situation journalists need to follow some specific code of ethics not to harm or affect viewers. Perhaps, relatives of the victims could be sitting in front of Tv and if they see dead body of their family member, it would be much shocking for them. This shows that Pakistani media channels have bad fall outs in absence of these basic codes of ethics.

On another occasion, a school bus meet incident on the way to Kalar Khar and dozens of elementary schoolchildren was killed. Journalists of prominent TV channels rushed to the spot and the first question that was asked of a bleeding, confused child was: How did you feel? “Enraged by this vulgar question, I had no option but to switch the TV off” (Kasana, 2012, P.4-6). Now here again the question arises that where is PEMRA and why media is not following code of ethics not to harm society?

In race of increasing their ratings, most of the time top Pakistani channels are noted showing and talking about very private and personal life of people in society.

Pakistan’s media practitioners, experts and public have started hot debate on code of ethics for Tv channels after Maya Khan’s morning show aired on SAMAA TV showed a group of women reporters chasing young couples in a public park in an effort to expose their „immoral

behaviour". (Abid, 2012, p. 2-4). Media is not allowed to interrupt someone's private life as it has nothing to do with public. Unethical reporting creates chaos in society and cross the limitations of freedom of press. As one of the well-known Political Philosopher John Stuart Mill has described in his book *Liberty*, that there are two kinds of freedom one is „absolute freedom“ and the other is known as „responsible freedom“. He argues that if media actions harm society then it should not be called responsible freedom, but if media is enjoying its freedom within some limitations where it does not affect or harm people then it's known as responsible freedom. (Brown, 2016, p. 999)

Najam Sethi, one of prominent analysts and host of current affairs program at Geo News, acknowledges that “the media is in a state of anarchy and people have no sense of responsibility,” (Abid, 2012, p. 3)

Private channels in Pakistan are only dependent on advertisements for the purpose to run their channels and pay to their employees and staff members. For this reason sometimes they do compromise on freedom of expression and pass very biased news reports to target audience which clearly violates freedom of press directly and can cause harm to people in the society.

“This is what John Paul II said in 2000: “With its vast and direct influence on public opinion, journalism cannot be guided by economic forces, profit, and special interest. It must instead be felt as a mission in a certain sense sacred, carried out in the knowledge that the powerful means of communication have been entrusted to you for the good of all.” (Hussain, 2012, p.3)

After detailed discussion in this paper, it is getting clear that Pakistani top news channels are violating these basic codes of ethics which consequently harm society and spread violence in society.

IV. Accountability:

According to *Social Responsibility Theory* all TV news channels must be accountable for its actions. These TV channels would be responsible and accountable for the basic code of ethics we have discussed above.

Aidan White, General Secretary, International Federation of Journalists, acknowledges that media accountability system needs to serve seven major purposes.

- I. To advocate freedom of the press in the society
- II. To inform public as it is their basic right
- III. To campaign for conditions that will enable journalists to serve their public better
- IV. To foster better understanding within society at all levels about the role played by independent journalism in democratic life
- V. To support journalists in their work and to encourage professional solidarity
- VI. To mediate complaints from the public in a transparent service, free of charge and to provide remedies for unethical conduct by journalists
- VII. To help build trust between journalists and public to ensure that media can resist political and economic pressure. (Pakistan Voice, 2012, p. 3)

It shows that the main purpose of the TV station and journalist's accountability is to build trust among masses. If there is social responsibility there must be accountability in the society. But these two goes side by side and are equally important for one another.

In June, 2012 many questions were raised on the accountability of journalists on Pakistani TV channels when two prominent TV anchors of Dunya News were seen facilitating a Pakistani business tycoon Malik Riaz. The off-air footage was leaked before actual show and

got viral on social media and YouTube. This issue was discussed on mainstream media as well and later on the show was termed as a planted show. General public condemned this act and raised many questions on media ethics in Pakistan. “However, what emerged from the whole episode so far, it seems, is need of an accountability mechanism for media persons and a proper code of conduct for media in Pakistan”. (Pakistan Voice, 2012, p. 1)

3.3 Role of Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA):

Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has been established on March 1, 2002. The main function of PEMRA is to regulate, monitor and facilitate all television and radio channels. It issues licenses to Tv news channel, FM radio, cable TV, Mobile Tv, and have the right to cancel license or stop broadcast of any channel if it violates basic code of conduct that are objectivity, truthfulness, fairness and accuracy. According to PEMRA report there are around 90 private news channels in Pakistan. PEMRA has made a list of code of conducts to improve standards of reporting and ensure and maintain quality journalism in Pakistan. PEMRA monitors hundreds of private TV and radio channels that are airing news 24/7.

PEMRA’s role in implementing basic codes of ethics on TV screens remain doubtful as many times clashes erupted between different ethnic groups due to wrong messages of news channels. There are many channels that take sides of one ethnic group and insult the other one for their own interests; these actions of media disturb the normalcy of society. It is laudable that PEMRA has made code of conducts for media channels in Pakistan but it has ignored to implement them due to military and political influence. “On May 24, 2016, the Supreme Court expressed anger at PEMRA for not taking action against television channels for telecasting programs to sabotage the democratic setup as well as provoking sectarianism” (Pakistan Press Foundation, 2016, p. 5)

The ineffective role of PEMRA and TV News channels not following code of ethics has given way to „Yellow Journalism“ in Pakistan. Politicians, army persons and influential people use media for their personal interests and as a propaganda tool. The European Journalist Centre (EJC) has called implementation of code of ethics and professional training to journalists in Pakistan (Smith, 2011, p. 6). Only this way media person could be refrained from yellow journalism in Pakistan.

3.4 Analysis of media coverage in light of these codes of ethics with recent examples:

Code of ethics in media refers to principles that regulate the activities of media. The main purpose of following code of ethics is to serve and safeguard public interest (Koki, n.d.p.3)

Electronic media has become an important part of Pakistani society. Private TV channels have attracted a lot of people to watch news, talk shows, and documentaries instead of reading newspapers and magazines. It is no doubt that these TV channels have been playing an important role to inform and entertain public and the availability of these private channels has ensured public access to information. At the same time it is equally important for all news media channels to pass each message with full responsibility and objectivity. This way media could build trust among masses and public. Media should be responsible and accountable for its messages and reports. Therefore we need to understand how to report in a decent way. For the purpose all media channels need to follow basic codes of ethics. Experts are of the view that Pakistani young media has made many mistakes after 2002.

As we have discussed in detail above regarding the emergence of hundreds of TV and Radio channels in Pakistan. Pakistan’s government felt need to propose code of ethics for

electronic media and ensure its implementation. But the role of PEMRA always remains doubtful and ineffective in fulfilling its duties. As pointing towards this issue Journalist and Director of the Centre for Excellence in Journalism, Kama Siddique has claimed that a sudden boom of hundreds of news channels has led to inadequate training of journalists. In addition, PEMRA need to strictly implement basic code of ethics and provide training to journalists to maintain high professional ethical standards on Pakistani television screens. (Saleem, 2017, p.6) It has been observed that Pakistan's news media channels are running after breaking news and they are always busy to add sensationalism in reports and documentaries. Showing violence, images of dead bodies and people crying in war zones are shown almost every day which cause panic in society. On 16 December 2014, some terrorists attacked Army Public School in Peshawar; terrorists killed at least 144 children in the school. This day Pakistan's top news channels such as Geo News, Express and Samma news were reported being busy in showing pictures of dead bodies of children which had a very negative effect on viewers. Pakistani news channels have increased fear and anxiety in public (Qureshi, 2017, p. 27)

Kamran Wajih, the director for planning and strategy at media outlets express group, believes that PEMRA is responsible body in such cases due to its weak monitoring system. He urged PEMRA to revisit its policies and ensure code of ethics in Pakistani news channels. (Saleem, 2017, p. 13)

Media is supposed to provide accurate information. Unconfirmed and incorrect information could create huge problems among public and societies. To be the first and with the aim to defeat other channels in rating, it becomes hard to come up with right information.

Pakistani news channels are in a competition to present or broadcast spicy news to attract more viewers. This is the only way that channels can get more advertisements and earn more money. This kind of competition has badly affected the truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity and accountability in news reports. As one of the Pakistan's media practitioner has quoted in her research that "After becoming liberalized in 2002, the television sector experienced a media boom. In the fiercely competitive environment that followed, commercial interests became a priority and quality journalism gave way to sensationalism" (Ayesha, 2016, P. 5) She argues that PEMRA was established for the purpose to keep check and balance on all news channels in Pakistan and ensure codes of ethics on their screens but in vain. Many times PEMRA had tried to perform its duties and play its positive role but there were always different hurdles in the form of political and military pressure (Ayesha, 2016, p.4)

"PEMRA is still facing challenges in implementing its rules and code of conduct because of litigation, corruption and political hurdles. Whenever PEMRA tries to take an action, a negative paid campaign on social media is initiated against the management" (Ayesha, 2016, p.11)

This is the matter of great concern for journalists and public in Pakistan. Due to ineffective role of PEMRA, the first priority of Pakistani news channels is to increase their rating points by using any means. In 2016, most of Pakistan's news channels sparked outrage with their coverage of the death of Pakistani philanthropist, ascetic, and humanitarian Abdul Sattar Edhi.

As one of the Pakistan's popular TV reporter rushed with live coverage to the grave prepared for Edhi and jumped into the grave and continued his coverage. Reporter tried to increase rating on this kind of reporting but public expressed anger and responded it a "ridiculous and indecent" way of reporting. "They are not told it is wrong. Ratings bring money. But this is where it should stop. (Ghani, 2016, p. 16)

4. Conclusion:

This paper has drawn a comprehensive picture of conceptual aspects of social responsibility theory and its main components defined by Dennis McQuail (1994). This helped showing indications towards basic codes of ethics necessary for TV channels and working journalists that are in the best interest of the society, country and state.

At the beginning of the discussion this paper has elaborated and analyzed the media landscape of Pakistan after 9/11 till date. And then the paper has thoroughly analyzed and discussed major codes of ethics that are truth and accuracy, fairness and impartiality, humanity and accountability. This discussion has generated an interesting debate on Pakistan's TV channels violating these basic codes of ethics and not following the proposed ethics which leads to unethical and irresponsible journalism in Pakistan. Mass media is an important social institution and in fact unethical journalism could create many problems in the democratic country. As we know that when credibility is lower, trust will be decreased, this is what happening now in Pakistan. In the absence of fundamental and universal media codes of ethics, majority of people do not trust everyday news in Pakistan. In this study we also examined that how journalists gather information, package information, broadcast and distribute stories in news media. Most of the examples were taken from top Pakistani channels where basic codes of ethics were completely ignored many times and caused damage to reputation of a person or institution. At the same time social responsibility theory warn journalists and media institutions from causing damage to society.

By considering the above facts it has become crystal clear that Pakistani electronic media channels are violating codes of ethics and they are not held accountable to public or government as many researchers acknowledges that PEMRA's role is ineffective and it is failed to implement these codes of ethics. In today's world media has a vital role in shaping public opinion, changing behavioral pattern and keep check and balance on government and private institutions, as (Roy, 2015, p.1) says that "Media acts as watchdog to protect public interest against malpractice". But coverage of Pakistan's TV channels seems irresponsible and immature.

The key findings of this research paper suggests that the Pakistani immature TV news channels or young media lack many important and basic codes of ethics and PEMRA needs to improve and strictly implement these ethics on news channels screens.

Moreover it is essential for TV channels, journalists and PEMRA to ensure basic codes of ethics that are discussed above because these codes of ethics are lenses through which we can also examine press freedom in any country. Given examples in the study shows that government, military and PEMRA has created barriers due to which media persons cannot follow basic or proposed codes of ethics.

This research is designed to be the tip of the iceberg. More research could be done on this subject to reach the grassroots' level of the issue and find better and long lasting solutions for quick and timely implementation of basic codes of ethics in Pakistan's electronic media. This research paper has briefly discussed almost all important factors affecting the implementation of codes of ethics in the light of social responsibility theory. Also it is notable for current policy makers, researchers, academicians and especially those experts working on issues of media codes of ethics and press freedom in Pakistan.

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