

THE PERCEPTIONS OF JOURNALISTS ABOUT THE INFLUENCES ON REPORTING FROM THE CONFLICT ZONES

Dr. Mahboob Ali¹, Dr. Jamaluddin*², Dr. Rooh ul Amin Khan³

¹Department of Media and Communication Studies, International Islamic University Islamabad;

*²Assistant Professor, Media and Communication Studies, University of Swat; ³Assistant Professor, Media and Communication Studies, International Islamic University Islamabad

¹mehboob22@hotmail.com; *²jamaluddin@uswat.edu.pk; ³roohul.amin@iiu.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: *

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ABSTRACT

The conflict, itself is very hard thing to cover but in case of conflict reporting, it is harder to report conflicting issues in media, either in print media or in electronic or online media. Conflict journalism demands more analytic outlook involving risking ground field reporting. However, it also caters evident portion of happening which is quite violent. During data gathering and news coverage, journalist have to face messy are not clearly defined like a container. The present study is aimed to analyze the journalists' perceptions regarding the importance of different levels of hierarchy of influence model in reporting from the conflict zones. Moreover, this study examines the variation in journalists' perceptions with respect to the influences on reporting from the conflict zones across different conflict zones. According to the findings of this study the ideological level is the most powerful in influencing journalists' reportage in war zones. This study has implications for journalists and journalism. Such studies can be very supportive for validation of diverse theoretical preposition of the influences of various level of hierarchy model with relevance to conflict area media coverage and reporting by adding more valuable insights into exiting literature. Journalist working in conflict zones must have some of the necessary qualities, might be inherent parts of a journalist's personality; others, gained through experience and discipline.

Keywords: Journalism, conflict, influences, Hierarchy of influence model

INTRODUCTION

A journalist's job is to find news and to report on it as quickly as possible, in an arresting and engaging style so while reporting on a local planning decision or a dramatic international conflict, a journalist plays very vital role in society. In many cases journalists got murdered, expelled or harassed. They have to face even existence of censorship and self-censorship in the media. This worse hatred against journalists has degenerated into violence and an increase in fear for working journalists. According to World Press Freedom Index (2019), there are number of countries regarded as very un-safe have increase and even the most

developed countries where journalists are allowed to work in complete security, continues to decline. For the sake of their contribution to freedom of expression, democracy and peace, every journalist takes its profession as an exciting and challenging task even sometimes glamorous and prestigious but still it demands hard work and smart work. It involves learning on the run, handling the pressure of deadlines and not knowing what the working day will be like from one day to the next. Furthermore, it requires physical and interactive skills emphasizing more on intellectual knowledge and up-to-dated information. This high level of commitment wants a journalist to have a nose for news, eyes over fast pace

changing world around him by managing any odd situation and gathering right information or news required for reporting. But this information seeking job is not a piece of cake as many fatal attacks occurred in countries previously unaffected by such extreme acts of violence against journalists. However, not all regions got affected at the same degree. In 2017, the largest number of killings took place in the Asia and the Pacific region (34% of all killings), while in 2016, the largest number of killings occurred in the Arab States (31% according to (IPDC, 2018).

There are many factors, external & internal, long term and short terms, seen & unseen, which affect journalists and their journalist tasks. In this globalized era, every nation tends to achieve that goal of developing sustainable and high-quality news media. The goal has been to encourage journalists to meet generally accepted international standards for professional journalism that supports transparent, democratic, non-corrupt government, and economic and civil development. However, journalists, news organizations and media houses are getting dominant in terms of information provision and breaking news phenomenon, which is very challenging by the rise of the internet and social media. Now factors like globalized media trends are getting more influential factors for working journalists so news organizations & media houses are operating across more platforms by engaging journalists with global audiences in more interactive ways as compare to past (Gade & Raviola, 2009).

Another major factor, according to some studies, is political pressure. While covering mega scandals, journalists have to work hard to pursue political dignities however many political leaders belong to developing even more advanced and developed countries, seek to secure themselves by taming the press/media. Many societies employ state-run news organizations to promote the propaganda critical to maintaining an existing political power base. It involves suppression like brutalities, police violence and hostility by intelligence agencies. These state-run mouthpieces take significant attempts against media or individual journalists to mold their working norm by getting approved "government line" on contentious issues. In some cases, established autocratic governments continue to tighten the screws on dissenting voices of

prominent journalists. In Asian countries, such "tightness of media" is very common which leads to breach in media dominance over public opinion. Political leaders always feel threatens to expose official wrongdoing or debunk official narratives. These developments alter the conditions of the legacy journalism profession (Deuze, 2005)

Among many other factors, socio-economic factors have influencing effect over journalist's tasks. These include work pressures and emotional demands on journalists and work-life balance. These factors range workplaces dynamics leading to professional growth and development, recognition, social interaction, and supportive management, the viability of long-term employment and job satisfaction. Along with passion, dedication and professional competency the journalism demands some other traits. It demands prolong work hard in odd hours by managing working in stress, work within deadlines and compromise of personal life for professional life. Under such odd situation, journalists are still low-paid. Low pay scale is also another factor which urges journalists willingly enter journalistic entrepreneurship which can affect their professionalism as it lacks understanding how journalists make sense of the entrepreneurial changes and its implications for their careers (Picard & Zotto, 2015)

Long working hours, hectic schedule, pressure to do more, missed vacations, irregular shifts like early morning and late night, staff cutbacks make a journalist to leave the field. The most at risk of leaving are young journalist, women and minorities. Moreover, the usage of digital technology in media industry is giving very tough time to journalists as they have to create more stress as of now media use demands media content for multiple media platforms like social media and blogs etc. It is creating digital competition. So high-levels of competition for audiences and advertisers is dragging journalist to bringing more business for media organizations, at the cost of media content production at low-cost, lowest-common denominator content such as crime, celebrity, sports, and sensationalism and other cheap-to-produce news. This constant digital connectedness and hectic schedule impacts their ability to balance work and family life demands. This trend is making a journalist more confused as he has to put balance between two

perspectives of professionalism. Journalism is being analyzed between the organizational demands of standards, routines, and goals for the media company and the occupational professionalism including values, norms, and identity that are developing among journalists themselves.

As journalism is a unique and specialized career that is not made for everyone, so there are certain qualities needed for a journalist in order to achieve success, not all of which are common or easy. For a Pakistani Journalist, this profession is not bed of roses at all. It not only calls for a curious mind and the passion for gaining and sharing knowledge but also important to be willing to escape your comfort zone to collect and share information. Pakistani journalist must have some of the necessary qualities, might be inherent parts of a journalist's personality; others, gained through experience and discipline.

The present study is aimed to analyze the journalists' perceptions regarding the importance of different levels of hierarchy of influence model in reporting from the conflict zones. Moreover, this study examines the variation in journalists' perceptions with respect to the influences on reporting from the conflict zones across different conflict zones.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The working dynamics of field reporting especially conflict area reporting seem a zigzag process of news coverage, "framing of news content" and final communication and information-processing for target audience. It changes journalist. It changes media content. So any pre-claimed can hook up the audience. It can drag audience towards disparate strands of research even can cause side-effect of the field while shaping, reshaping and control of media content. The conceptualization of conflict journalism does not involve a consistent style of explanation of happening always. It is not like an intuitively appealing idea of agenda-setting context that link a journalist to content by framing it for target audience "think about" phase. Conflict journalism demands "actual picture" of actual situation. It does not demand any "frame" or any pre-set agenda setting. It demands an extensive body of research into this idea of how a journalist faces the conflict and how he

brings out actual content out of it. It is not an easy rhetorical step to go, to cover and just report an event.

The hierarchy of influences model can help little in this regard. The pioneer work of Shoemaker and Reese (2016) offered this model mainly focused on conflict journalism/reporting by presenting different hierarchy of influences that can/cannot affect professional autonomy of the journalists while working in conflict area. In fact influences as barriers can hinder the professional autonomy of the journalists while poor field planning and weak post-coverage analysis. It is also linked with pathetic activities and disorganized actions including both lack of time and resources. Too frequently, journalists drop in and out of conflict areas without sufficient preparation and understanding of the local context. They also work with tight deadlines and lack the time needed to build and understand local relationships. So they really suffer due to conflicts. But hierarchy of influences model finds something more about it. It postulates that factors affecting media content can be usefully classified at different levels of analysis by leading and organizing all into a model. The hierarchy of influence model organizes what have been laid out as various theoretical perspectives on the shaping of media content, including as follows the suggested categories of Örnebring (2009). Some of the key features of this model are as following

The gender aspect of journalism has also been analyzed by Orgeret (2015). In conflict zone female journalists, face more safety challenges. Moreover, exploring the significance of the gender; the study argue that conflict reporting is likely to be covered more professionally if groups of journalists covering the conflict are heterogeneous.

Wilson & Ibrahim (2018) elaborated that men and women both are targeted in the challenge of sexual violence in war and conflict zone. The study reported that man fatalities are less to visible to public discussion as compare to women vulnerability. This paper indicated the paradigm of journalist safety to female-victims and male-aggressor direction, means discriminating against women and underestimating the vulnerability of men colleagues. Studies have also highlighted ethical reportage in a war and conflict zone and issues and challenges in reporting information.

The risk to journalists has also been investigated in terms of gender differences. Palmer & Melki (2018) argued that female journalists are similar to the male journalists in their potential of conflict reporting. Moreover, Female journalists, have an extra advantage in entry into private spaces or accessing female sources which are not accessible to male journalists in time of conflict reporting. Moreover, the study argue that female have an advantage in situation because shape shifting can protect them from dangers in the field. Such evidence has negated the traditional view in which war journalists have been described as masculine personality with hard work, self-sufficiency who face and encounters dangerous environment.

The impact of gender and journalism has been the subject of studies. Ross (2002) indicated in a study that women face problem in the journalism industry dominated by men. Nonetheless, the study also shows that women working in decision making position would have an impact on developing a women-friendly news agenda. According to Steiner (2017), different standard of judgments are used for men and women journalist who report on war and conflict. Those women who are mothers and who go to war zones face condemnation while on the contrast men get escaped from public criticism. The author further argues that women are at high risk of sexual violence and harassment and such women have often been found not reporting their stories because of the fear of job loss. The role of gender in journalism has been the subject of many studies and women have been found to be facing problem in their promotion due to male attitudes and women are underrepresented in media organizations (Gallagher, 2001) and women journalists have faced violence during reporting (Sreberny, 2014; Brambila & Hughes, 2019).

The conflict reporting has also been shown to have various impacts on journalists' well-being. These among others, include psychological and emotional impacts. Tumber (2006) studied the experiences, life and motives of reporters, and the fear and danger that the journalists face during conflict reporting. The study further showed that these factors in turn have impact on the truth reporting against war reporting, the dynamics of gender and its impact to journalist lives, work and their understanding to conflict coverage. Similarly, a

study by Feinstein, *et. al* (2015) explored the violence during conflict and its impact on journalist psychological health. These include emotional and psychological threats (Ashraf & Brooten, 2017; Jamil, 2017). The foregoing literature show that journalists reporting in the conflict zones is influenced by a variety of factors and influences, however there is also increasing evidence that reporting in war and conflict times, the psychological health of the journalist is also under risk. This study assumes that this impact is likely to be perceived by the journalists to have a close association with news reporting from a conflict zone.

METHODOLOGY

The hierarchy of influence model is used selecting the population of the journalists in the conflict zones of Pakistan. The entire population of the journalists who have been involved in reporting from the conflict zones constitute the universe of the study. A total of 29 conflict zones are identified in the country where 3492 journalists are registered with the selected conflict zones' press clubs. The nature of conflict in these areas are ranging from religious (Swat, Dir Upper, Dir Lower, Buner, Peshawar, Bajaur, Waziristan (N), Waziristan (S), Mohmand and Orakzai) to Sectarian (Gilgit), while in some areas, the nature of conflict is mix of Sectarians & Religious (Kurram), Ethnic & Religious (Baluchistan) and ethnic, sectarian & religions (Karachi). This information is presented in

Table 1.
Information about the Conflict Zones, Numbers of Journalists and Nature of Conflict

No.	Conflict Zone	No. of Press Club	No. of Journalists	Nature of Conflict
1	Swat	5	95	PR
2	Dir Upper	3	22	PR
3	Dir Lower	1	26	PR
4	Buner	1	15	PR
5	Peshawar	1	54 0	PR
6	Bajaur	2	34	PR
7	Waziristan (N)	1	24	PR
8	Waziristan (S)	1	15	PR
9	Mohmand	1	18	PR
10	Kurram	1	16	PS&R
11	Orakzai	1	12	PR

12	Karachi	1	21 50	PER&S
13	Gilgit	1	75	PS
14	Quetta	1	16 2	PER&S
15	Kohlu	1	8	PE
16	Noshki	1	12	PE
17	Awaran	1	11	PE
18	Mastung	1	13	PE
19	Khuzdar	1	9	PE
20	Dalband din	1	14	PER&S
21	Harnai	1	10	PE
22	Turbat	1	12	PE
23	Panjgur	1	10	PE
24	Gwadar	1	22	PE
25	Loralai	1	11	PR
26	Zhob	1	14	PR
27	Chaman	1	28	PR
28	Pashin	1	10	PR
29	Dera Bugti	1	10	PE
			3398	

*PR= Predominantly Religions, PS&R= Predominantly Sectarrians & Religions, PE= Predominantly Ethnic, PS= Predominantly Sectarrian, PER&S= Predominantly Ethnic, Religious, Sectarrian

**Source: Authors own Calculation from Press Clubs of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Sample selection procedure and sample size

The following step entails selecting an appropriate sample size from the previously outlined areas of conflict. In order to fulfill this objective, information regarding the press clubs and journalists has been gathered. Using the appropriate statistical methods, the sample size is determined based on the size of the total population that is being studied. For the purpose of selecting the number of journalists, a technique known as SRS is utilized. After the target areas have been determined, the actual sample size, denoted by the letter "n," is computed. To arrive at an accurate estimate of the required number of samples, the Cochran formula is applied:

$$X = Z^{(c/100)^2} r(100-r)$$

$$N = N^x / ((N-1)E^2 + x)$$

$$E = \text{Sqrt}[(N-n)^x / n(N-1)]$$

Where N represents the size of the population, r represents the proportion of responses that are of interest to you, and Z(c/100) represents the critical value for the confidence level c. The total number of journalists living in the 29 zones that were chosen amounts to 3398 people. Using the aforementioned calculation, we can determine that the sample size is 358, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. In order to choose representative samples from each combat zone, we utilized the following formula:

$$n_i = n \cdot N_i / N$$

Where, n = Total Sample size, n_i = Sample Size to be selected from each conflict zone, N is the number of journalists in 14 conflict zones and N_i = Total number of journalists in each conflict zone.

Samples selected from the 29 conflict zones in Pakistan. The study samples were based on areas where religious conflicts have been the phenomena happening in areas such as erstwhile FATA, Malakand Division, and the provincial Capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Sampling techniques and Sampling frame for Focus Group Discussion

To ensure a representative sample, a multi-stage sampling approach was used. In the first stage, a stratified random sampling technique was used to select five press clubs from different regions in Pakistan, such as Karachi, Gilgit, Quetta, Swat and Peshawar. This study selects 50 experts from the population of 3398 journalists from different parts of Pakistan. In the second stage, a convenient sampling technique was used to select 10 journalists from each of the five press clubs, who had experience reporting from conflict zones and were knowledgeable about the hierarchy of influence model. The final sample of 50 journalists was a combination of participants selected using both stratified random and convenient sampling techniques, which ensured a representative sample of the population of journalists in Pakistan. To further increase the representativeness of the sample, a purposive sampling technique was used to select experts from the sample who had a deep understanding and extensive experience reporting from conflict zones. This multi-stage sampling approach helped ensure that the sample of 50 journalists was representative of the population of journalists in Pakistan and provided a robust basis for

exploring the research questions. Regarding the impact of COVID-19 SOPs, it is stated that the FGDs were conducted face-to-face. The researcher implemented additional safety measures, such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and the use of hand sanitizer, to ensure the safety of the participants and the staff during the FGDs.

DATA

Based on the literature review, a close-ended questionnaire has been developed. The relevant variables related to problems faced by the journalists in conflict zones are incorporated in the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises of the following sections:

Analytical Technique

With Likert scale data we cannot use the mean as a measure of central tendency as it has no meaning. Hence, this study combined the data into two nominal categories Agree and Disagree, which allows us to carry out the Chi-square test. To analyze the statistically significant difference between the expected frequencies and the observe frequencies, this study uses Chi-Square test.

Reliability and Validity of Data

The Cronbach's Alpha is used in this study to assess the internal consistency and reliability of scales. The internal consistency of several scales of individual level influences, routine level influences, organizational level influences, extra media level of influence, and ideological level of influences have been examined.

Table 2.
Reliability Test

Job Description	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Internal Consistency
Individual level influences	08	0.893	Good
Routine level influences	08	0.738	Acceptable
Organizational influences	05	0.743	Acceptable
The extra media level of influence	17	0.711	Acceptable

The ideological level of influences	04	0.843	Good
Perceptions about the influences on news reporting	12	0.722	Acceptable

*Source: Authors own Calculation

The alpha value for scale 1 "individual level influences" has a value of 0.893, which is regarded exceptionally excellent based on the data. As given in Table 2, there is internal consistency in all questions on the scale. There is also plenty of evidence of internal consistency for influences at the routine level. The alpha values for the scales "Routine level influences" and "organizational influences" are 0.738 and 0.743, respectively, which are satisfactory. Similarly, the "extra media level of influences" score is 0.711, which is likewise adequate. The alpha value for Scale 5 "the ideological level of influences" is 0.843. As a result, each question on the scale has internal consistency.

The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is used to determine whether the survey has a similar pattern of responses and whether the items are organized in such a way that they produce a construct. The EFA is applied to each notion to see whether there is a consistent pattern of replies throughout the survey questions and if the items are structured to create a construct. In this study, the correlation between the items is examined using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

Table 3
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.893
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square Significance
	23548.618
	0.000

Source: Authors own Calculation

Because the Chi-Square values are significant at the 1% level, the items are appropriate for factor analysis. We may use the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) test to see if the items are eligible for factor analysis. Factor analysis is suitable if the KMO value is more than 0.50. As a consequence, we conclude that the items are adequate for factor analysis.

RESULTS, FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the results and discussion. Since, this study hypothesizes that “there is difference as perceived by the journalists on the relative importance of various levels of influences of Hierarchy of influence model across provinces”. To serve this purpose, a comparison of different levels of influences is performed. Different levels of influence can have an impact on a journalist and his/her output (news/media content).

Table 4. Comparison of various levels of influences of Hierarchy of influence model

Questions	Average Agreement Index	Level of Agreement ¹
Individual level influences	0.24	Low
Routine level influences	0.33	Moderate
Organizational influences	0.25	Low
The extra media level of influence	0.32	Moderate
The ideological level of influences	0.35	Moderate

*Source: Authors own Calculation

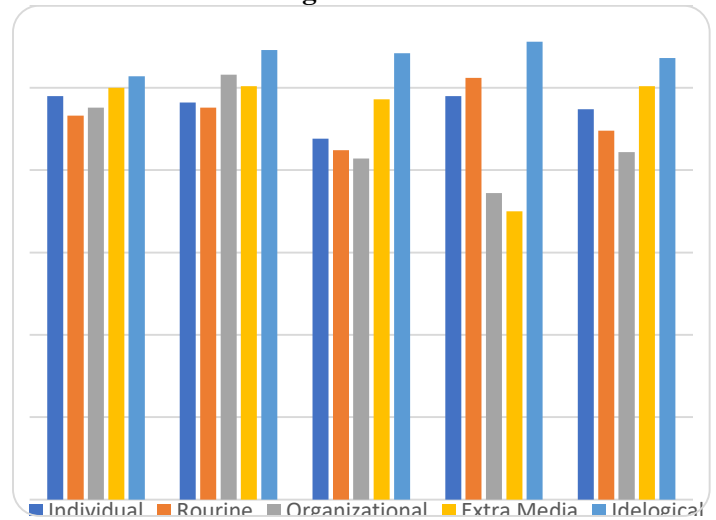
Based on the findings, it is concluded that journalists' reporting in war zones is influenced at all levels. However, the ideological level is the most powerful in influencing journalists' reportage in war zones. Hence, we accept the hypothesis 2 that “there is difference as perceived by the journalists on the relative importance of various levels of influences of Hierarchy of influence model across conflict zones”. However, at the same time, we reject hypothesis 1 that “The individual and routine level influences are perceived stronger by the journalist as compared to other influences in conflict reporting”.

Inter Conflicts Comparison

This study is carried out in five conflict zones consists of 29 districts of Pakistan. The conflicts in these areas are, mostly, mix in their nature. Classifying broadly, it can be argued that conflicts in Pakistan are ranging from religious

(Swat), to Sectarian (Gilgit), to routine level of influence (Peshawar) while in some areas, the nature of conflict is mix of religious and racism (Quetta) and ethnic, sectarian & religious (Karachi).

Figure 1: Inter Conflict Comparison: Agreement Scores of levels of influences across regions



*Routine level Swat, 2.33 Individual level Swat, 2.45
 Routine level Quetta, 2.38 Individual level Quetta, 2.41
 Routine level Peshawar, 2.12 Individual level Peshawar, 2.19
 Routine level Gilgit, 2.56 Individual level Gilgit, 2.45
 Routine level Karachi, 2.24 Individual level Karachi, 2.37

**Source: Authors own Calculation

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering Pakistan's recurrent placement among the most hazardous regions globally for journalists to operate, the field of journalism in Pakistan is intrinsically fraught with danger. The present study is being conducted in five discrete geographical regions within Pakistan, namely Swat, Quetta, Peshawar, Gilgit, and Karachi. The objective of this study is to enhance comprehension of the difficulties encountered by journalists at the local level when

¹ The level of agreement is categorized into five various categories on the basis of average index score. Where, the estimated average

index 0 – 0.25 as very low, 0.25 – 0.30 as low, 0.31 – 0.50 as moderate, 0.50 – 0.65 as above average, and 0.65 – + as high.

covering conflicts, as well as to examine the media's involvement in such reporting within the present communication landscape. The study involved the selection of 358 journalists from 29 distinct combat zones inside the country. The results suggest that the journalists who were selected for the study and tasked with reporting from the conflict zone demonstrated a lack of influence from their personal beliefs and convictions when reporting on the conflict. Furthermore, the findings substantiate the idea that a significant proportion of journalists operating in the conflict area were capable of upholding their impartiality in their reporting. These findings offer further evidence that the autonomy of journalists at an individual level remains unimpeded in their coverage of news from disaster zones. The degree of influence exerted by the journalist's employing organization, conversely, imposes constraints on their autonomy. The findings of the study suggest that the influence of family, friends, and acquaintances significantly shapes the news coverage of journalists working in crisis areas. In conflict zones, journalists encounter various influential factors, including but not limited to readers, listeners, or viewers, competing news organizations, government officials or administration, politicians, media laws, resources, and equipment, pressure groups, news sources, religious leaders, advertisers, and media watchdog organizations. Consequently, it has been determined that journalists are subject to influence from various sources, including their counterparts in different media platforms, competing news organizations, audiences, acquaintances, and family members. These influences significantly affect the journalists' performance when covering disputes. Based on the research findings, it is evident that the religious affiliation, ethnicity, and origin of journalists exert significant influence on the manner in which news is reported from the combat zone. This is in accordance with the viewpoints expressed by the journalists themselves. It is evident that the journalists who were surveyed hold differing opinions regarding the level of effect exerted by other media factors. The findings revealed that a significant proportion of the journalists included in the study expressed either strong agreement or agreement with the notion that various factors, such as the journalist's personal background, professional background, educational

level, training, experience in journalism, and religious affiliation, exert a substantial impact on conflict reporting. Consequently, it can be deduced that the religious affiliation, ethnicity, and origin of a journalist are significant elements that influence their perspectives. Based on the empirical evidence, it can be inferred that the level of routine significantly influences the manner in which journalists engage in conflict reporting. In hierarchy of influences model, the routine level of analysis is considered the most constraining influences over working journalist. Journalists, reporters and correspondents either work for radio, television, online news sites, and printed newspapers or magazines, they continuously work, work hard to deliver updates and analysis that allow the public to witness and understand history in the making. Moreover, it is concluded that extra media level influences are perceived with different degree of agreement by the sampled journalists. It is evident that majority of the sampled journalists strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that the editorial policies of media organizations compromise on the quality reporting of conflicts. Further, based on the findings, it is inferred that extra media level of influence and ideological level of influences affects journalists' conflict reporting. Based on the results, it is inferred that extra media level and ideological level has a considerable effect on news reporting from conflict zones.

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