Journalism as a profession: An examination of the cognitive dimension of professionalism

*Muhammad Ashfaq
Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan
muhammadashfaq@msn.com

Javaria Zubair
Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan

Noor-ul-Ain Shahid
Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Journalistic professionalism in underdeveloped countries is perceived as not up to the mark as they do not have the right education and training to help them acquire expertise and professionalism in journalism. This study investigates the cognitive dimension of professionalism, one of the three dimensions offered by Singer in his model of professionalism. Qualitative analysis of news content (N=348) and interviews with working journalists in Pakistan were carried out. The open and axial coding method was used to generate codes/themes, and results suggest that university education is not enough to prepare journalism students for the field. Results also demonstrate that journalists lack professional knowledge and skills like sourcing, and news evaluation to differentiate facts and rumours.

Keywords: ***Professionalism, content analysis, interviews, journalism, qualitative analysis***

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

The key feature of professionalism for journalism can be linked to individuals with specific training, skills, abilities, and judgment. The primary determining features that differentiate a professional and a layman can be distinguished and evaluated based on the professionalism criterion. Indeed, the benchmarks of journalistic professionalism need to be set and adopted perforce by journalists to produce the best content as a vital service to the society. First, journalists must be equipped with the right skills; secondly, they must demonstrate ethical, and moral values and thirdly, practise freedom and autonomy as basic tenets when working on news stories and other content. The media organisations, institutions, and journalists themselves must work towards raising the standards of professionalism (Diana & Avery, 2019). As the media industry continuously evolves and undergoes transformations, news outlets must find alternate ways to reach their audience and communicate with them (Long, 2014).

Journalistic practice is an empirical construct that consists of three dimensions, that is, cognitive, normative, and evaluative (Mellado, 2015; Waldenström et al., 2019). As such, journalistic professionalism espouses the idea of responsibility, decision-making skills, and collective values which have evolved over time. Further, transparency, objectivity, moral codes, and ethics form the fundamental basis of journalistic professionalism (Anderson, 2011; Waldenström et al., 2019). In today's contemporary world, journalism faces numerous challenges stemming from emerging technologies, where individuals have access to information in real-time and at their fingertips, and proceed to act as content creators and journalists.

Professionals are generally associated with power and prestige in any profession (Hermida & Mellado, 2020). While commercial media has long dominated the news media landscape, the trend towards more collaborations in journalism has emerged in the recent past. For many years, the journalism sector has been fiercely competitive (Pavlik, 2021). In any modern society where journalists are considered as storytellers, they tend to render ethically and factually accurate reporting as it is the fundamental nature of reporting and as a service to the society in shaping the minds of individuals (Yeoh, 2013).

Trained professional journalists spend years in rigorous field training and professional education, and espouse various philosophical values which represent the trademark of the profession. In this regard, Singer's 3D Model of Professionalism defined three main skills that a journalist should develop with the necessary education (Singer, 2003). While global journalism continues to evolve rapidly, there is a dearth of literature available on journalistic professionalism in Pakistan. Thus, this study hopes to fill this research gap by assessing the criteria of journalistic professionalism through the lens of Singer's 3D model dimension and hope to shed light on this topic for future scholars and practioners alike.

PROFESSIONALISM: A REVIEW

While the term professionalism is often described as the excellence to which journalists aspire (Singer, 2003), there is no consensus yet on the sociological definition of professionalism. Journalism does not require any mandatory prerequisites, such as a professional degree and training, unlike other professional fields. According to researchers, journalists should be conscious of their service to society in the content they create and publish, keeping in mind that they are the builder of narratives that are disseminated to the society (Tavakol & Sandars, 2011; Thomas, 2019).

It is difficult to define professionalism, if one assumes that the role can be carried out by a person with a particular talent, judgment skills, or academic credentials in that field (Heravi, 2019). However, it is safe to assume that a professional journalist is someone who has graduated with a journalism degree/diploma or a journalist who receives monetary compensation for his/her published works. Nevertheless, a specific education background, skills, proper training and license is not required to enter the field (Singer, 2003). Therefore, it is difficult to establish the definition of a professional journalist and its characteristics. The type of journalists vary depending on the tasks they do. For example, due to decreased opportunities or changes due to technological advancements, some may have been forced to leave the industry altogether while others have transitioned to a freelance career. As such, professionalism cannot be confined to one aspect only. The catalytic nature of various other professions is less as compared to journalism because in modern media enterprises, journalists must be guided by and committed to professionalism in their jobs. (Vos et al., 2019). Journalist jobs are not secure and precarious as at times, they have to take an opposing stand on various important matters with stakeholders, which is a necessary part of the profession. Ambiguous institutional structures and lack of transparency have led to news reporting and writing being characterised as very causal or informal as opposed to formal academic credentials or intense training in other fields like medicine or law (Skovsgaard & Bro, 2011; Vos et al., 2019). Given the absence of any specific merit criteria to enter this field, journalism is characterised by the focal task of serving the society more than any other profession (Vos et al., 2019). Journalists are confronted with the continuous task of managing and proving their authenticity (Anderson, 2011; Vos et al., 2019). Today, one of the dangers confronting journalistic practices is the expanding utilisation of database-driven stories which are often ambiguous and fall outside the conventional practices of professional journalism (Anderson, 2011; Chadwick & Collister, 2014).

ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS

News coverage creates an everyday record of changes that take place in the social orders of countries. Mass communication is an essential and important channel to educate the general population, as the formation of healthy public opinions is beneficial for the society. Nonetheless, by recording history in a decentralised way, journalists are acknowledged as the watchdogs of society and a component that holds people accountable for their actions. This implies that the work of journalists directly affects lives, culture, and choices that people make. Subsequently, it is of extreme significance that the stories they produce must be accurate and factual for two reasons: to maintain their credibility and to provide a true account of the story that takes place. The stories must create an impression of reality, which can be comprehended by the public (Heravi, 2019). Today, contemporary media is flooded with varied news providers, which raises pertinent questions: Who is a professional? Who is credible enough to be trusted and quoted as a source? What qualities are important for a journalist?

THE COGNITIVE ABILITY OF JOURNALIST

Although cognitive ability plays an important role in journalism, it remains an understudied topic. There are not many empirical studies on journalism, specifically on various factors that play an important role in the journalist's expertise (Wai & Perina, 2018). The cognitive dimension comprises the knowledge and skills including the necessary

training and processes required to master the skills. In regard to the field of journalism, the cognitive dimension becomes challenging. Some fundamental skills are associated with the profession of journalism including reporting and writing, and these skills are learned and mastered in professional degree programmes (Long, 2014). Some studies found that 89% of all American journalists had college degrees, and 36% had professional degrees in journalism (Hunter, 2015; Long, 2014).

It is generally believed that individuals rarely check the accuracy of information encountered online, but when they do, they utilise the confutation (truth-evaluation) procedure that requires the least sources. All things considered, most media instructors will recommend both theoretical and practical courses. As such, these instructors regularly assess issues that involve both theory and practical knowledge (Rodny-Gumede, 2017).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present study adopted Singer's three-dimension model of professionalism as the theoretical framework, specifically the cognitive dimension, for which data was collected and analysed.

The study seeks to investigate the professionalism of Pakistani journalists, both the conceptual and operational aspects of the cognitive dimension as per Singer's categories. Thus to conduct this study, it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of Singer's model (Larson, 2017; Singer, 2003) as well as terms such as professionalism and cognitive capacity of a journalist. Singer (2003) developed a three-dimensional model which can utilised as a useful framework for both print and electronic media. As mentioned earlier, the cognitive dimension when applied to the field of journalism can be quite challenging. Firstly, there is no set or defined rules for the required skills and knowledge or requirements to join the journalism profession. However, there are various degree programmes to train those interested to report and write to become professional journalists. In most countries, journalists go through a training phase in high school and university, but in Pakistan, there are no journalism courses offered in universities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What are the criteria of journalistic professionalism in Pakistan within the cognitive dimension?

RQ2: Does university education in Pakistan fulfil the needs of the journalism industry?

RQ3: What techniques are being used by Pakistani journalists for fact-checking?

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, comprising of two parts: (i) content analysis and (ii) interviews. Based on the selection of journalists, their news content (N= 348) was analysed. Themes that emerged from the content analysis was used to develop the interview questions. A qualitative methodology was adopted as it will help draw out rich insights regarding the various concepts and phenomena, behaviour, perceptions, feelings, and understanding of the subject under study (Rahman, 2017). The journalists selected for the study have more than five years of experience in the field.

Due to the empirical nature of the subject and dearth of literature available, research questions were used instead of hypotheses. The reason for not adopting a quantitative

method is because researchers are more interested in exploring why certain phenomena vary (Tavakol & Sandars, 2011), and for this study, the researcher wanted to acquire a deeper insight into the professionalism of Pakistani journalists. Interview questions were framed to gather data on how journalists take into account the cognitive dimension of professionalism and the specific roles journalists play while working on their stories. The interview data was examined and compared to the journalists' news stories to find commonalities and differences. In-depth interviews seemed the most appropriate way since most of the activities of journalists and their writings are based on specific experiences (Chung & Nah, 2014).

Data collection and content analysis

Data was first collected from media content (news stories, columns, and talk shows) published between February 1 and June 30, 2020 as well as in-depth interviews of working journalists across Pakistan. The data was then analysed with regard to professionalism, journalistic practices, as well as journalists' professionalism. to identify common themes and codes.

To ensure accuracy and validity, first, the researcher read the news stories multiple times to make sure that no point has been missed out. Secondly, while transcribing the interviews, the audio recording was listened to multiple times, and, thirdly, the interview data analysis was sent to the respective journalist to cross check to ensure that all the points had been quoted correctly.

Interviews

Interviews are widely used as a data collection medium in qualitative research to gain in-depth understanding about the subject's experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and values regarding a certain phenomenon (Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2017). A one-on-one interview is the most suitable method to record the feelings, attitudes, observations, and experiences of the participants. For this study, a total of six journalists were asked a set of semi-structured questions by the researcher which allowed the journalists to share details of the work they do and the associated circumstances. All the journalists interviewed had at least five years' experience and came from the six different media outlets: 1) Zahid Gishkori from *The News*, 2) Riaz-ul-Haq from *Dawn*, 3) Saqib Bashir from *Express*, 4) Asad Chaudhry from *The Nation*, 5) Zaheer Ahmed from *Pakistan Today*, and 6) Muhammad Wasim from *Geo News*. The selection of media outlets was done on the basis of circulation and viewership. Initially, the researcher did an in-depth analysis of their work and analysed them as per Singer's 3D Model of Professionalism. Due to the nature of the subject, interviews were conducted face to face to capture the their expressions. The time of the interviews varied from journalist to journalist depending on their schedule.

Validity of study

Subjective examinations or qualitative methods help researchers understand and perceive patterns and designs among words to develop an understanding of a phenomenon without trading off its complexity and dimensionality. To establish the validity of the study, the researcher used three types : descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity. Descriptive validity was done by involving multiple (three) researchers in data collection and analysis. Interpretive validity was checked by sharing every interview analysis with the interviewee to ensure accuracy while theoretical validity was carried out by discussing the results and conclusion with peers who were not directly involved in this study.

RESULTS

Analysis of media content

The media content was analysed using the cognitive dimension of Singer's Model of Professionalism. The themes that emerged from the analysis are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes that emerged from media content analysis

Code	Description
Lack of Information	The journalist fails to mention the deadline regarding the projects and gives incomplete information
Credibility	Journalists build up their credibility by mentioning certain incidents which prove the wrongdoings of various organisations
Education	Flaws in the education system are a point of concern for journalists since they are responsible for shaping the minds of people
Confidentiality	Journalists and sources work side by side, hence most journalists abide by the bond of confidentiality and trustworthiness with their sources
Language	The skills of the journalists are to be mentioned here, while talking about the wrongdoings of the government and other organizations, the language used is very mild and toned down.

The first code that emerged was the lack of information in the work of most journalists. Saqib Bahsir, a senior journalist associated with *Express Tribune* argued,

> *"There may be two reasons for that: One, the organization to which journalists are attached won't let them post anything which may harm their reputation or their agendas with various parties; and secondly, the journalists are obliged not to publish any sort of content which may harm the public as a service to the society."*

Although lack of information or incomplete media content can be damaging to the audience to some extent, most journalists seem to be practising this, for example, Zaheer Ahmed from *Pakistan Today* and Muhammad Wasim from *Geo News*. For instance, in one of the media content, the journalist failed to provide dates and details of the story. The absence of these details makes it hard for the audience to judge and evaluate the information given in the story. At some point in the near future, this could prove to be harmful to the public. In some other news stories, the journalists fearlessly chronicled the full account, especially stories which cover the conditions of jails and prisoners' suffering such as "*Jails hold prisoners three times of their capacity*" and "*About 90,000 prisoners in 120 jails*". On one hand, they depict the condition of jails and the bills passed, but on the other hand, contend that the bills are stuck in the passing phase. This discrepancy of information can be attributed to journalists toning down or changing the angle of their story in a certain way for the sake of public safety or due to external pressure. In either case, lack of information can be seen as a hindrance for journalists to carry out their work.

Journalists should always aim to provide the true account of a story to their audience. For this purpose, verification from sources is a mandatory step before journalists can use the information provided. Further, to obtain the desired information, journalists need to establish a bond of confidence and trust with their sources. In most of the content examined by the researcher, journalists abided by the bond of confidentiality and trust with

their sources. All documents, facts, clauses, and information were used by the journalists without disclosing their sources' details as sources may want to remain anonymous for their own safety. This reflects the professionalism of the journalists. However, in some stories, the names of sources were mentioned by the journalists with their consent.

The usage of language in the selected news stories seem appropriate, however, at certain points, the journalists used humour as a tool to mock the government, for example, in comparing the present and previous governments. In one news story, "*Mother Nature protects Govt*" regarding the power shortage problems in the summer, Asad Chaudhry jokingly reported that while the policies of the current government remain same as of the previous one, extra rains have protected the current government from public criticism. In some of the stories where the journalists are critical of the government and their wrongdoings, the language used was very neutral and mild. This suggests bias toward a specific party which is not professional on the part of the journalists. On the other hand, by referencing texts from the court and highlighting the language used by the court implies that the journalist is more into authentic reporting, rather than sensational journalism. It should be noted that the language journalists use in their stories influences their audience both in a good and bad way. The type of language used may shape the minds of their readers and lead them towards developing certain perceptions concerning the various agendas the journalists may have. The basic activities journalists carry out include interviewing, investigating, and fact-checking for the sake of providing information to the public, but they may also resort to manipulative techniques and strategies to reinforce certain beliefs.

Education is another important aspect that is essential for both journalists and the audience as the public needs to be aware of the flaws in the education system. At times, media outlets act as think tanks as they are responsible for shaping the minds through the content they produce. Some of the stories analysed looked at the flaws in the education system as well as how the education system is affected and lagging in the field of research and innovation. Moreover, the journalist also strongly criticised the education system for being part of the number game (focused on quantity), instead of becoming an asset for advancing the nation. Another ailing sector is medical education, where again the students become victims of the current system. According to Zahid Gishkori, a senior journalist, while the aim of the country's medical education is to produce the best doctors and physicians, it is falling short of this objective. One of the major issues plaguing the system is an existing flawed policy which allows a student to sit for medical exams as many times as possible, resulting in quacks instead of professional qualified doctors.

Most journalists cover issues which demand a high level of attention from the government or involve the concerns of the public. For instance, news regarding the passing of bills and statements by high officials are meant for the public so that they can be aware of the blame game politicians get into. Secondly, some stories looked at the number of patients for various diseases and described how most of the hospitals are understaffed and beyond their capacity to cater to the ever-increasing number of patients. These issues should be taken seriously by the government so that additional resources and budget can be allocated to refurbish the hospitals. Apart from the opinions and research work of the journalists, the news stories also carried the views and recommendations of related experts.

Journalists and their sources work together to provide the public with an accurate account of a story. Bound to a code of confidentiality and trust between journalists and their sources, journalists are able to paint the full picture of pseudo acts that are played by various officials and organisations. In a court case story covered by Saqib Bashir, while the names of the sources were not mentioned, several references and the names of involved politicians were stated. Based on the source, the journalist also mentioned the updates

of the case and the people who were there at the time of court hearing. In safeguarding the source(s) and providing the audience with facts and figures, the journalist's credibility amongst the audience is reinforced. The more credible a journalist is, the more trust the audience places on him and the information provided. In summary, the findings demonstrate that the journalists in Pakistan are in a ongoing endeavour to enhance their credibility and professionalism, and to some extent, some have succeeded.

Analysis of interview transcript

Table 1. Themes generated from interview transcript

Code	Description
Less emphasis on academic degree	Media or journalism course syllabus requires revision. The primary focus of the universities should be on field training rather than the theoretical aspects of journalism.
Credibility of source and journalist	The bond between sources and journalists is permanent; any form of betrayal causes harm not only to the journalist but the whole profession too.
Rumour and facts	To maintain credibility, journalists verify information obtained from various sources and cross check with legal documents; they also try their best to separate facts from rumours.
News evaluation	In Pakistan, sensational journalism is a very common practice as journalists frame the stories in a certain way. Journalists prefer publishing content, which is as accurate and credible as possible, because their name is attached to the story.

The cognitive dimension states how the basic education of journalists proves beneficial when entering the practical field. For Research Question 2, these were the basic questions that were asked to regarding the professionalism of journalists:

1. Were they equipped to enter the practical field after the completion of their degree?
2. Were they trained enough to verify the information they get from their sources as credible and how do they make sure that the information they are getting is authentic?
3. Are there any rumours/false information in the information they receive or just the facts?
4. To avoid the spread of fake or false news, what measures do journalists take?
5. What prompts a journalist to think that a specific news is worthy of coverage?

Most of the interviewees opined that a basic academic degree gave them some idea about the industry and the practical aspects involved. Unfortunately, it does not sufficiently prepare journalists for the drill and fieldwork they will encounter when they do actual reporting. Thus, the journalism or communications university programmes in Pakistan require a revision, in which there should be more emphasis on the field training of students rather than equipping them with the theoretical aspects of journalism. In Pakistan, the more you are in the field, the more you learn about the practical aspects of journalism while interacting with other fellow journalists because a degree does not provide this. Thus, university programmes should incorporate modules to prepare future journalists for fieldwork. Zaheer Ahmed claimed to have learned only 20% of what he is practicing in the field from his university programme. Muhammad Wasim, Riaz-ul-Haq, Saqib Bashir, and Asad Chaudhry concurred that they only received basic knowledge about media and how reporting works during their university studies which had not been much helpful in the field.

Zahid Gishkori added that the education system of Pakistan does not help students who want to work in the field and there are less or no opportunities for students after they graduate. Universities focus more on theoretical knowledge rather than preparing students for fieldwork. Moreover, Zaheer Ahmed, claimed that he learned news composing, accuracy, and reality in his degree programme, but they were not taught how to develop news sense. It is the prime responsibility of journalism schools and university programmes to equip students with a basic understanding of reporting and salient features of newspapers i.e., columns, editorials, etc. In this case, the experience of the journalist and the importance of the issue matters the most. According to Muhammad Wasim, the most important aspect for the public is newsworthiness and journalists learn this through experience while working in the field. Since most journalism programmes taught in universities are very outdated and the teachers there have no media exposure or practical experience, hence revision in these areas is badly needed.

Another issue with the journalism industry is that anyone who writes or publishes content claims to be a journalist. The profession is affected due to the unfettered access and availability of online platforms where everybody can post content and claim to be a journalist. However, the role of actual journalists is to verify information they get and separate rumours from facts, providing their audience with the most accurate stories. A professional journalist tends to use multiple sources to verify the information they obtain. In Pakistan, the more sources journalists use, the more credible their news stories become. The news sources in Pakistan are guaranteed through the bond of trust and confidentiality; the more you safeguard them, the more information you will get which will in return enhance your credibility as a journalist. The bond between sources and journalists is permanent, any form of betrayal causes harm not only to the journalist but to the profession itself. Thus, journalists must protect their sources and cannot risk losing them by quoting their names.

DISCUSSION

Singer's model of professionalism has three dimensions. However, this study focused only on the cognitive dimension that contains two main components: knowledge and techniques, as well as the training required to acquire these skills. The major responsibility of journalists is to gather information and transform it into news stories. This job requires knowledge and skills ranging from information gathering to producing a news story. A person with little or zero knowledge can enter the industry, hence becoming a potential threat to the credibility of journalism. The first thing that helps one to become an actual professional journalist is the basic degree which is responsible for developing the cognitive ability of a journalist. The cognitive capacity of a journalist references to how new sources are found, sources are safeguarded, news is evaluated, and information is presented to the respective audiences. However, almost all the journalists agreed that their professional degree did not help them prepare for the actual fieldwork. A university programme only provided them with the rudimentary knowledge of theories and concepts of reporting, which left novice journalists poorly equipped going into the field. Further, journalists also shared that the concept of reporting changed when they went into practical fieldwork. This is one of the main reasons why they recommended that the communications or journalism programmes in universities to be revised, to meet new standards and to keep pace with the global trends of journalism.

When the work of Saqib Bashir was compared with the points raised in his interview, both talked about the journalism programmes taught in universities. Muhammad Wasim too claimed that things have changed from the time he obtained his degree till now and to have mastered his skills of reporting with field experience.

Singer's model also looks at the techniques used in producing news stories such as information gathering, processing, and writing. Asad Chaudhry quoted that while facts and figures provided by the sources are published, the identity of these sources are kept hidden which reflects professionalism. In their pursuit to exposing certain issues to the audience, journalists should keep in mind ethical values that must be adhered to. As such, journalists in Pakistan have kept their sources anonymous while providing their audience with sensitive information, for example, on power shortage and political issues. Some quoted the names of the sources with their consent. These journalists highlighted pertinent issues to the public and criticised the government for not being efficient in resolving the issues. On the other hand, for water, dam, and sanitation issues, journalists used a distressing and alarming tone to prompt the audience to take the necessary actions. According to Riaz-ul-Haq, this is known as sensible journalism.

One important reason for this is to avoid misunderstanding which can lead to chaos. It is also to expose the wrongdoings of the government and related parties. Asad Chaudhry from *The Nation* attested:

> *"I try to talk to both the parties in any conflict. Obviously, if there is a conflict regarding anything, I talk to the one who is claiming, suppose x says that y has done this thing. I ask y about it and then again confront both parties about blaming each other. I put things into perspective. It gives credence to the story as I quote both people, in other words, both sides of the story."*

Good journalistic practices include reporting both sides of a story to avoid creating conflict and prejudice amongst the audience. However, most journalists seem to lack this quality and do not adopt this practice, except for a few. On the other hand, some journalists are bound by their organisations not to report on both sides while some of them are not able to get any feedback/response from the concerned parties.

With regard to the newsworthiness of the media content, the topics and stories reported require public attention and needs to be addressed by the government. The journalists also target certain parties who are responsible for doing nothing and for corruption.

The journalists contended that their basic degree did not prepare them for the fieldwork as they were only taught theoretical knowledge which did not prove beneficial in the field. Riaz-ul-Haq, a journalist with Dawn had this to say:

> *"Unfortunately, the course design of universities in Pakistan needs improvement. The specialization course you are required to complete in the last year is merely a time pass. There should be a well-designed and well-thought-out programme from the beginning to train students for when they enter the practical field. My choice was always to report either in electronic or print media. I was supposed to be prepared in the university, but I only had basic knowledge that was nearly enough to get into the field."*

All the journalists agreed on the importance of news sense and newsworthiness of any sort of media content disseminated to the public. The prime responsibility of a journalist is to bring forth issues of concern for discussion. Saqib Bashir claimed that media in Pakistan is audience-driven, that is, any news that is considered newsworthy by the audience. Some of the issues raised by the journalists require serious attention by the authorities as well as the public as they are quite alarming and shines a light on where the society is heading with scarce resources, flawed systems and inefficient implementation.

The professionalism of journalists can be judged by the way legal issues are presented to the audience. The claims brought to light must be given due consideration and action especially those regarding child abuse and child trafficking. Although there are various recommendations from various stakeholders, sadly nothing concrete has been done so far. Logically speaking, what is the purpose of asking suggestions from stakeholders or concerned parties unless action is taken on these recommendations? Thus, although journalists may have carried out their duties in creating awareness and highlighting serious issues, these issues remain unresolved due to numerous challenges and impediments.

CONCLUSION

In Pakistan, a journalism degree from the local universities does not equip journalists with the right practical skills and as a result, does not meet the requirements of the profession. A Mass Communication degree with a specialisation in production may help students to a certain extent but not for journalism, which require skills like reporting, story writing, column writing. The main reason for this is because universities focus more on theoretical and conceptual work rather than practical work. As such, Pakistani journalists learn practical skills while working in the field through challenges and hardships. Thus, university programmes should be revised as per the current requirements of journalism, and global trends.

The cognitive dimension by Singer comprises basic education and skills of the journalist, and to become a professional, one needs acquire the relevant expertise and skills as demanded by the profession and media outlets. Only by learning the ropes in the field, can an aspiring journalist be able to acquire the decorum and professionalism of the profession. Be it ethical reporting or maintaining the confidentiality and trust of sources, journalists must master all the necessary skills of reporting to be called a professional. Journalism and journalists are responsible for bringing truth to the audience and are therefore accountable to the public.

References

Anderson, C. W. (2011). Deliberative, agonistic, and algorithmic audiences: Journalism's vision of its public in an age of audience transparency. *International Journal of Communication, 5*(19), 529–547.

Chadwick, A., & Collister, S. (2014). Boundary-drawing power and the renewal of professional news organizations: The case of The Guardian and the Edward Snowden National Security Agency Leak. *International Journal of Communication, 8*, 2420–2441.

Chung, D. S., & Nah, S. (2014). Negotiating journalistic professionalism. *Journalism Practice, 8*(4), 390–406. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2013.813198

Diana, B., & Avery, H. (2019). Burning out and turning off: Journalists' disconnection strategies on social media. *Journalism, 19*(9−10), 1452−1470. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919872076

Heravi, B. R. (2019). 3Ws of data journalism education: What, where and who? *Journalism Practice, 13*(3), 349–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1463167

Hermida, A., & Mellado, C. (2020). Dimensions of social media logics: Mapping forms of journalistic norms and practices on Twitter and Instagram. *Digital Journalism, 8*(7), 864−884. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1805779

Hunter, A. (2015). Crowdfunding independent and freelance journalism: Negotiating journalistic norms of autonomy and objectivity. *New Media & Society, 17*(2), 272–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814558915

Konow-Lund, M., & Olsson, E.-K. (2017). Social media's challenge to journalistic norms and values during a Terror Attack. *Digital Journalism, 5*(9), 1192−1204. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2016.1243990

Larson, M. S. (2017). The rise of professionalism: A sociological analysis. In S. Aronowitz & M. J. Roberts (Eds.), *Class: The anthology* (pp. 263−286). Wiley. https://doiorg/10.1002/9781119395485.ch20

Long, K. A. (2014). Conceptualizing citizen journalism: Definitions and roles. *Theses and Dissertations– Community & Leadership Development,* 13. https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cld_etds/13

Mellado, C. (2015). Professional roles in news content: Six dimensions of journalistic role performance. *Journalism Studies, 16*(4), 596–614. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.922276

Pavlik, J. (2021). Engaging journalism: News in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research, 13*(1), 1−17.

Rahman, M. S. (2017). The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language "testing and assessment" research: A literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning, 6*(1), 102−112. doi:10.5539/jel.v5536n5531p5102

Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2017). Towards new co-creational approaches for research and supervision in professional journalism degree programmes. *African Journalism Studies, 38*(3−4), 100–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2017.1395752

Singer, J. (2003). Who are these guys? the online challange to the niton of journlaistic professionalism. *Journalism, 4*(2), 139–163. https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490342001

Skovsgaard, M., & Bro, P. (2011). Preference, principle and practice: Journalistic claims for legitimacy. *Journalism Practice, 5*(3), 319–331. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2010.542066

Tavakol, M., & Sandars, J. (2011). Quantitative and qualitative methods in medical education research: AMEE Guide No 90: Part II. *Medical Teacher, 36*(10), 838−848. https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2014.915297

Thomas, R. J. (2019). Helpfulness as journalism's normative anchor addressing blind spots and going back to basics. *Journalism Studies, 20*(3), 364−380. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1377103

Vos, T., Eichholz, M., & Karaliova, T. (2019). Audiences and journalistic capital: Roles of journalism. *Journalism Studies, 20*(7), 1009−1027, DOI: 1010.1080/1461670X.1462018.1477551

Wai, J., & Perina, K. (2018). Expertise in journalism: Factors shaping a cognitive and culturally elite profession. *Journal of Expertise, 1*(1), 57−78. https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/volume1_issue1/JoE_2018_1_1_Wai_Perina.html

Waldenström, A., Wiik, J., & Andersson, U. (2019). Conditional autonomy: Journalistic practice in the tension field between professionalism and managerialism. *Journalism Practice, 14*(3), 493–508. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1485510

Yeoh, P. L. (2013). 'Dog whistle journalism' of racialising Myanmar refugees. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research, 5*(1), 19–34.

Muhammad Ashfaq

is an assistant professor and the Head of Department at the Department of Arts & Media, Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan.

Javaria Zubair

obtained her master's degree in media science from Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan. She is currently working with a media outlet.

Noor-ul-Ain Shahid

obtained her master's degree in media science from Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan. She is working as a freelancer.