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- Author (s):** Muhammad Shabbir Sarwar¹, Muhammad Salman Shafiq², Javairia Shafiq¹, Fatima Sajjad¹
- Affiliation (s):** ¹University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
²Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China
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Media Code of Conduct Violations: A Study on Mass Communication Education and Practice of Professional Ethics

Muhammad Shabbir Sarwar¹, Muhammad Salman Shafiq^{2*}, Javairia Shafiq¹, and Fatima Sajjad

¹School of Communication Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

²Guanghua Law College, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

Abstract

This paper investigate the relationship between media code of conduct violations by television news channels' anchorpersons in Pakistan and their educational background, specifically comparing formal media graduates to non-media graduates. It also analyzes complaints lodged against 23 prominent news channels based on the data from Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). The method of quantitative content analysis was applied on PEMRA complaints data for analysis. The results indicated 18 percent more tendency to violate media ethics among non-media graduate anchorpersons as compared to media graduate anchorpersons. Political bias and the dissemination of unverified content emerged as the most common complaints against both anchorpersons and news channels. The study suggests that a lack of understanding of relevant laws contributes to these violations, highlighting the need for legal education among media professionals. Furthermore, it identifies specific news channels that have received the highest number of complaints, including Kohinoor, Awaaz TV, and Samaa TV.

Keywords: anchorpersons, communication, law graduate, law information, legal fraternity, media ethics, media code of conduct, Pakistan

Introduction

With the growth of private television channels in Pakistan since 2002, media code of conduct violations emerged as a serious societal concern. The debate whether a violation is actually a violation can vary depending upon perspectives, perceptions and contextual factors. In Pakistan, Islamic values define the morale and ethical standards of a society and therefore, state run TV channel PTV is operating within its frontiers since its inception in 1964. Global media principles with in its large perspective can be the base line especially for developing countries. They can go through these

*Corresponding Author: 12302040@zju.edu.cn

rules in order to implement in respective states as per local customs and traditions (Berg, [2022](#)).

Maintaining oversight of media practices is essential, with both media outlets and journalists expected to adhere to a code of conduct while reporting news on any media platform. Media ethics reflect the customs and traditions of the society (Ahmad, [2022](#)).

As the lines between interpersonal and mass communication, as well as the private and public domains, are becoming increasingly blurred, there is a need to reassess the relevance of Goffman's work in communication research (Lunt, [2022](#)).

Most media ethical rules promulgated in the previous century, and online content creation often relies on volunteer reporting (Rozeahna, [2022](#)). Personal digital data is often considered intangible, immaterial things, despite having significant impact on people's life. Digitalization of news reports is in practice with more emphasis on availability (Watson et al., [2022](#)).

Media and journalism ethics are as important as the media news, reports and other programs. Live telecasting requires specific rules and regulations (Berg, [2022](#)). Now private TV news channels have become very powerful in the country (Sarwar, Haq, Shafiq & Shahzad, [2020](#)).

Today, we see individuals disseminating news and building up public opinion without formal media education, potentially exacerbating ethics code violations of Media (Brennen, [2021](#); Sajnani et al., [2018](#)).

The journalistic culture in Pakistan falls short of the set standards by PEMRA, with many talk shows aired on prominent T.V channels undermining the country's solidarity and abet all kinds of offensive remarks which are cognizable under the applicable laws (Hamid et al., [2016](#)).

Background and Literature Review

According to the Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan – 1973:

Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of the Press, subject to any 'reasonable restriction', imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan or any part thereof,

friendly relations with foreign states, public order, or in relation to contempt of court or incitement to offence.

The media was given autonomy but subject to the ‘reasonable restriction’. In order to avoid these restrictions, the Council of Pakistan Newspapers Editors (CPNE), All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) and Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) developed specific rules and codes for press to follow during practice.

In order to maintain a strong check on media ethics, an authority was established, named, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). Rules developed by the said authority are known as PEMRA Ordinance 2002 and main purpose was to regulate and help the private electronic media. Mandate of the authority is to enhance the criteria of information, education and entertainment to make more options available to the Pakistani citizens which include current affairs, daily news, sacred information, culture related programs and documentaries as well as the use to latest technologies which are available and are in regular practice. The mandate also states to facilitate the devolution of responsibility and power to the grass roots by improving the access of the people to mass media at the local and community level. It also ensures accountability, transparency and good governance by optimization the free flow of information (Deane, [2015](#)).

Established as an autonomous regulatory body, PEMRA is tasked with ensuring that electronic media outlets adhere to established standards of ethics, responsibility, and professionalism. The ordinance outlines the composition and functions of PEMRA, emphasizing its role in promoting a free, fair, and responsible media environment. Under the ordinance, PEMRA is granted authority to issue licenses for broadcast operations, ensuring that media organizations comply with guidelines related to content, advertising, and technical standards. The ordinance also outlines penalties for violations, ranging from fines to license suspension or cancellation. Furthermore, PEMRA is tasked with addressing complaints and disputes related to electronic media. The ordinance grants the authority the power to investigate and adjudicate on matters concerning media content, ensuring that it aligns with societal norms and values (Sajjad & Jalil, [2018](#)).

The code delineates content standards, emphasizing accuracy, fairness, and impartiality in reporting. It provides a framework for the creation and dissemination of content, ensuring that it aligns with the principles of responsible journalism. Additionally, the code addresses the sensitivity of electronic media to the diverse cultural and religious values in Pakistan, promoting content that is respectful and considerate of societal norms. Advertisement regulations form a crucial component of the code, specifying guidelines for the content and timing of advertisements to prevent misleading or inappropriate advertising practices. The code also includes provisions for handling viewer complaints, establishing transparent procedures for individuals to voice concerns about content that may violate the prescribed standards (Mustafa & Ameen, [2023](#)).

For the journalistic community to play its due role in Pakistan there is also a code of media ethics which states the responsibility of a journalist with reference to reporting, news dissemination and providing information while following the code of conduct (McPherson, [2009](#)).

Speaking of which, the Ministry of Information issued the Electronic Media Code of Conduct in 2015 as violations and variations from the rules had become alarmingly frequent, ranging from allegations and unsupported "facts" becoming common features of discussion to live coverage of violent situations that jeopardized law enforcement operations, the spreading of hate speech and even media crews intruding into hospital wards or carrying out 'raids' on citizens' homes or places of work (Moreno et al., [2013](#)).

Anchorperson also take side with political parties and such political polarization affect contents credibility (Sarwar, Umer & Bajwa, [2020](#)). More often uncivil language is used, which affect the society negatively. The political parties should also abide by the ECP and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) code of conduct during their election campaign (Sarwar, Haq, Shahzad & Shafiq, [2020](#)) The real challenge is the implementation of this code of conduct so that the media actually works for what it really is, i.e., to educate, inform and to entertain. PEMRA has been working since to ensure smooth operational dynamics of electronic media and has given several penalties to the violators (Sarma et al., [2020](#)).

Statement of the Problem

Every field or discipline requires its specialized personnel for its successful development and expansion. Regarding Pakistani electronic media, PEMRA (Pakistan electronic media regulatory authority) has displayed a competency and responsibility when it comes to keeping a guard over media ethics violations. However, despite its efforts, instances of ethics violations persist, highlighting the need for further examination.

This study focuses on media ethics violations committed by journalists, distinguishing between formal media graduates and non-media graduates. Research and attention are particularly drawn to the concepts of how the impartial knowledge of non-media graduates contributes to an increase in media ethics violations and the nature of these violations.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to determine which group, formal media graduates or non-media graduates, violates more ethical codes more frequently.

Additionally, the study aims to identify the most common types of ethical violations conducted.

Significance of the study

The study poises a promise to contribute to the theoretical and practical framework of the knowledge of media studies. It would provide an edge to the society overall to report even the trivial form of ethics violations and would encourage the people to speak about it and learn more about it. For the professionals, it would act as criteria to appoint the media personnel on the basis of their knowledge of the field.

For researchers and the academics, it would provide as an authentic source of reference, a subject of observation and analysis, a means to create further research questions and contemplation.

Scope of the study

This study is not only limited to the body of knowledge but it goes beyond it. It would enable the government, information technology and media institutions to appoint the media personnel on merit and keep a strong guard over media regulations. For PEMRA and other media regulating bodies, insights from the study can inform the development of new

regulations or the revision of existing ones to address prevalent violations. Policy makers would also find the study helpful while constituting new codes or updating the older ones. It can also assist them in providing a *horizon window* for their traditional and digital media campaigns for public awareness and social upbringing.

Research Questions

RQ 1: Did TV channel anchorpersons with no formal media and legal education commit more violations of code of ethics compared to anchorpersons with media graduate education in 2018?

RQ 2: What kind of violations of media ethics/codes were committed by media graduate anchorpersons and non-graduate anchorpersons?

RQ 3: Which news channel made the most ethical code violations in 2018?

Method and Material

The data for this paper is derived from formal complaints registered with Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) in the year 2018. An official request was sent over to PEMRA for detailed information of the complaints lodged against anchorpersons during 2018. The quantitative content analysis technique was applied to measure the data.

. Research Population and Sample

Research population for this study comprised complainants lodged with PEMRA against the top 14 anchorpersons, who also possess legal knowledge, of Pakistan. Also, complaints against 23 TV news channels were part of the research population. All entities within the research population were also considered as the research sample. Unit of analysis was each individual complaint submitted to PEMRA.

Analysis was drawn examining the educational backgrounds of these selected journalists and the frequency of the complaints launched against them in the year 2018. A table was created to present a clear comparison of educational backgrounds and complaint frequencies. The reliability of the data is guaranteed by PEMRA, which is a government body and the sole electronic media regulating authority in Pakistan.

Also, to see which news channel made the most codes violations, another table was made analyzing a report sent by Pakistan Electronic

Regulatory Media Authority consisting of 23 most prominent news channels of Pakistan and the number of complaints lodged against them in the year 2018. The nature of these complaints was also analyzed and five major categories were identified to illustrate where the channels made most of the violations.

Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis were derived after adding up the total number of violations of both the categories i.e. the ones with formal media degrees and the ones without it. The results were in favor of the media graduates; whose collective violations were less than those who were not.

Table 1

Anchorpersons with top complaints registered with PEMRA

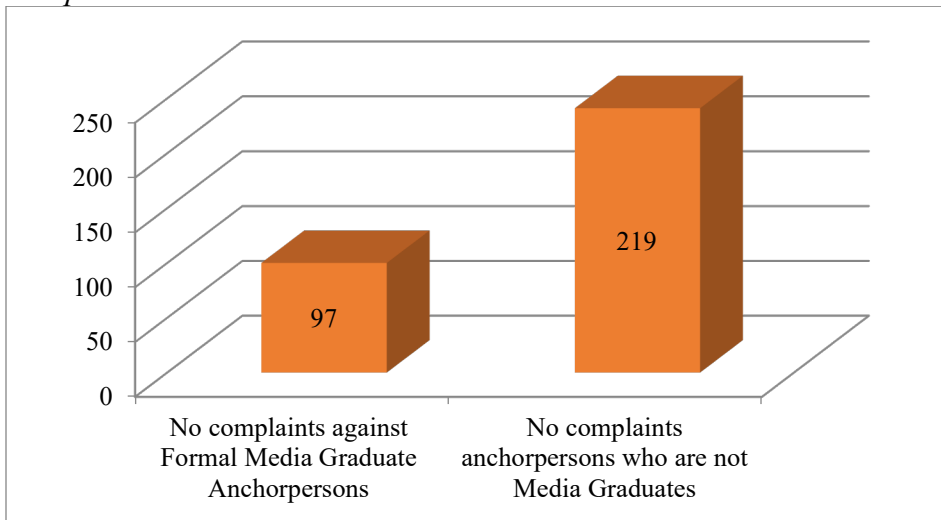
Anchor	Complaints	Education
Hamid Mir	45	MA Mass Communication
Waseem Badami	34	Bachelor of Arts
Mubasher Luqman	31	Bachelor of Arts
Dr Shahid Masood	30	MBBS
Saleem Safi	27	Bachelor of Arts
Talat Hussain	24	MA
Iqrar ul Hasan	26	MA Mass Communication
Ansar Abbasi	22	Masters in Mass Communication
Shahzaib Khanzada	23	BS Electrical Engineering
Kashif Abbasi	18	Bachelor of Arts
Kamran Khan	17	Bachelor of Arts
Asma Shirazi	12	MA Pol Science
Javed Chaudhry	4	Masters in Mass Communication
Mehar Bukhari	3	Bachelor of Arts

Table 2

Complaint: Gradates and Non-Graduates Comparison

No PEMRA complaints against Mass Comm. Graduate Anchorpersons	97
No complaints anchorpersons who are not Mass Comm. Graduates	219

Figure 1
Complaints



The findings of this study indicate that the anchorpersons who are media graduates tend to commit fewer violations of the code of conduct/ethics those who do not possess a formal media degree. Sultan et al. (2016), mentioned in the literature review also supported the results of this study.

It is concluded that media graduates demonstrate a heightened sense of responsibility in abiding by the rules established by any authoritative body in terms of Media regulation, as discussed by Gordon et al. (2012). In contrast, individuals without a formal media degree may not fully comprehend the extent of the violations they commit, often considering certain inappropriate behaviors as routine or acceptable.

Five major categories, determining the nature of the complaints lodged against these anchorpersons were found.

- Complaint producing unverified news
- Sensationalism
- Airing in app. content and videos
- Defamation of political parties
- Non privacy of the affected parties/victims

Table 3
Complaints against TV Channels

Complaint Nature	TV channels
Complaint Producing unverified news	TV channels, Kohinoor TV, Sach TV, Star Asia, Bol News, Capirtal TV, News 5, Ravi TV
Senstaionalism	Channel 24, AWAAZ TV, Channel 92, Bol News, Neo Channel, ATV, Kohinoor TV
Airing inapp. Content and videos	ARY News, ASMAA TV, Din News, Express news, Duniya News, Geo News, Kohinoor TV
Defamation of political parties	Geo News, DAWN News Urdu, Kohinoor, News 5, Ravi TV
Non privacy of the affected parties/victims	City 42, Kohinoor TV

Critically acclaimed news channels were seen making ethical code violations by not keeping a check on privacy measures for the affected parties or the victims of an unfortunate event. *Kohinoor TV* remains constant by appearing in all the five categories of complaints and becoming the highest violator of ethical codes in 2018. *Sach TV*, *Star Asia*, *Bol News*, *Capital TV*, *News 5* and *Ravi TV* ranked high in producing unverified news. Defamation of political parties and sensationalism were found some common complaints launched against Dawn News Urdu and Geo News along with all the remaining channels.

Table 4
News Channels and the Complaints of Media Ethics Violations Lodged in 2018

T.V Channels	No. of Complaints received in 2018
ARY News	58
ATVV	34
Awaaz TV	70
BBC World	23
Capital TV	50
Channel 24	45
Channel 92	47
City 42	57

T.V Channels	No. of Complaints received in 2018
DAWN news Urdu	55
Din News	64
Duniya TV ent.	35
Duniya TV news	30
Express News	49
Geo News	52
Kohinoor	94
Neo Channel	86
News One	77
News 5	66
Sach TV	56
SAMAA TV	66
Star Asia	71

Analyzing the list of private news channels, it was concluded that Kohinoor TV made the most of Media ethics violations. The nature of these complaints included use of inappropriate language, demonstrating political biasedness in the shows and perpetuating false news.

Conclusion

The study on media ethics violations by journalists (anchorpersons), who are formal media graduates and non-media-graduates was conducted by applying the method of quantitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *RQ1: Whether formal media graduates commit more violations of code of ethics as compared to those who didn't acquire formal media education?* Revealed that news anchorpersons who hold a formal media degree committed less violations of media code of conduct than those who do not have media education background. The complaints against those who were media graduates were 18% less than those who were not media graduates. Study of Hafez (2002) supports these results.

The answer to *RQ2: What kind of media ethics violations were made in 2018 by media graduate anchorpersons and non-media graduate anchorpersons*, Study found that the most of the complaints are common which are enlisted underneath the name of every anchorperson.

The analysis of complaints lodged against country's most prominent news channels resulted in the findings that Kohinoor TV made the most of ethical code violations in the year of 2018. The literature supports these

findings as reflected in Mahmood (2019). Data clearly showed that some news channels present routine news updates as breaking news only to create hype.

The study also finds out that ethics of media are being violated by media itself. In the race of popularity and competition to break news first, media does not manage to deliver the quality of information to the audience neglecting factual accuracy and social or moral responsibility (Adeni & Harahap, 2022). This results into anarchy and the distorted perception of public towards certain social issues.

The analysis on the nature of complaints reveals that media outlets tend to exaggerate the government's adverse points. Similar to how negative projects are not prioritized or sometimes even positive ones are, which also breeds despondency among individuals. Instead of serving the public interest by providing factual reporting, media sensationalizes news to attract viewership and advertising revenue, thereby heightening anxiety among the general public.

Three factors came up front as the major causes of poor journalistic practice in Pakistan regarding the media ethics violations made by journalists and the media news channels both. They are as follows:

- Substandard training by the media channels and media regulatory authorities
- Inadequate quality control
- Political motivations

To address these issues, the study suggests implementing stronger measures for journalist training, improving quality control processes, and mitigating political influences within media organizations. Friend and Singer (2015) emphasized the importance of comprehensive education and training for journalists, including courses on ethics and empathy building. Nonetheless, media have a diverse role to play and its own responsibility to comply with therefore; the code of ethics must be embraced by every media channel and all-inclusive media bodies to ensure an exemplified and outstanding working of the media.

Recommendations

On the basis of the study results the researchers recommend policy makers, new researchers and media regulatory bodies to focus on the following areas:

- The degree of media studies/communication studies should be made compulsory by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority before hiring of any media personnel. Those who are non-graduates and currently working in the field, should be given a transition period of two to three years to acquire the degree of media.
- PEMRA should publicize complaints lodged against TV news channels and anchorpersons on a weekly basis
- Set up a specific reporting process that will keep an eye on the media and its main operations and submit a yearly report on any instances of inciting hatred or false, provocative, or ethically questionable journalism, particularly in the area of covering religious affairs or relations between various communities.
- Start encouraging more investigation into the key details of reporting that, in this case, have been recognized as causes for concern, such as the verification of potentially inflammatory data prior to release, i.e., the publication of justifications and modifications of misleading information.

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