

## **Immediacy and Journalistic Authority for Reporting Environmental Disasters: Case Study of 2022 Floods Of Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Real-time journalism is informing the public about the pace of the event that is happening. The story changes as time passes. It is playing with the nerves of the people as at that time the media is the only source of information and people are compelled to believe it. In the case of flood reporting and the reporting of the flood-affected areas makes the people of that area attentive and ready to take action upon the instructions of the media. In such a situation, as and when any single news channel tries to break the news of any emergency. Panic has been created in the target area and the people of that particular area try to escape from that area because they don't know the volume of water coming in in such a situation many lives have expired due to the panic situation. The more dangerous is that the other news channels also follow the first line and start exaggerating the activity of that area and this becomes more dangerous because the people of target areas get frightened, and this makes their lives miserable. For this research, we have selected five Pakistani news channels during the 2022 flood in Pakistan. We will analyze the one-month highly flood season news reporting of these channels i.e. July 16 to August 15, 2022, how much news they break, and whether there was a need to flash that news as breaking news.

**Keywords:** News channels, breaking news, flood reporting, newsrooms, news organizations

### **Background**

Lack of good content, government interference, exploitation of journalists, differences with academia, and the rise of digital platforms are some of the challenges facing the media industry in Pakistan. The rush to release news as soon as it breaks has resulted in misinformation and challenges News Ethics. This speed of breaking news has created huge pressure on the reporters and on the other hand it is having a bad

effect on the general public as they are losing trust in the news channels, they feel that the development of the news channel has lost credibility of news stories among the common people. News organizations should have a responsibility not to chase breaking news, they should chase good journalism, nowadays people are gradually realizing that verification is “very important” and “finding news is not enough”.

Journalists should have a duty to filter content to ensure that no false information is being released; such a check takes only a few minutes. If they fail to verify the news correctly, they can lead themselves and their organizations to disaster.

There are four applicable laws regarding fake news and false information or misinformation.

- PEMRA [Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority]
- PICA [Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act]
- Pakistan Penal Code 499
- Defamation law deals with cases of liability, slander, defamation, and misrepresentation.

Criminal proceedings may apply under these laws.

Pakistan’s electronic media has grown up in the last 2 decades. More than 50+ private news channels are operating in Pakistan but still, there is no maturity among these news channels, especially in the race for breaking news. Every news channel tries to break the news earlier than others and in this hasty and irresponsible act the channel forgets to verify the news content and after verification, it goes on air. It was clear to Pakistanis that TV stations were resorting to false reporting, sensationalism, and exaggeration in the absence of credible news and analysis. The questions are being asked once again from all over Pakistan why poorly trained and incompetent reporters, news anchors, and newsroom staff were put in charge of a very important story for Pakistan’s 230 million and millions of people abroad.

The media needs to review its role as the “breaking news race” and sensationalism is damaging the social fabric of society. There is no doubt that training and understanding as well as journalistic ethics are neglected on TV. This may be because our media is not mature enough or because we want to compete not only with each other but also with the social media monster. However, sometimes newsrooms are under so much pressure that they have to air unverified content. In operational situations, they have to disseminate unverified content to compete and stay relevant. We are not saying that they shouldn’t try to verify news items, but these are operational decisions they have to make.

In flood reporting, it became more sensitive and critical because any type of



misinformation regarding any area may create a panic situation in that area and it is more critical for the people of that area to escape to the safe places. Suppose any one news channel on-air news in the shape of breaking news about any flood-affected area that flood water has entered the villages and if this news is followed by other news channels without verifications, then this information will create panic in that area and people trusted on the news will abruptly leave from their homes and move towards unknown direction. So it is very important to cover such type of news because it may take the lives of many people. In such a situation, rather than focusing on breaking news the channels should follow the early warning messages through their channels and alarm people well before time to move towards safe places.

### **Literature Review**

Electronic media in Pakistan has faced challenges over the past 20 years, and this period is challenging for all forms of media. The electronic media showed that they were not responsible, and the people you see on TV talk without knowing the facts and without a good reason. Journalists are always looking for stories that will catch people's attention. The eagerness to be the first to report breaking news has led to unverified information being released, which is not good journalism. Some people think that false information spreads quickly because it catches people's attention. Others believe that people sometimes choose to accept the information they like, even if it's not true. We believe that journalists and news organizations do not know enough about the law. However, this does not mean that they are not responsible for what they publish. Sometimes, journalists are not responsible for mistakes made in a breaking news story.

Abrams, the author of the critical article, believed that the errors were caused by the police giving out incorrect information rather than the news teams not being attentive (Sullivan et al., 2012). Law enforcement agencies often hide information from journalists and give them incomplete or misleading information to prevent the public from interfering with their investigations (Kilgo, 2021). Moreover, current journalism places greater emphasis on "sharing information and making sure it is accurate as they go" (Tenor, 2018). Kathryn Schulz, a writer from America, explains that journalists have a part inside them that allows them to do their best work in a short amount of time, share it, and then make changes later on. In the fast-paced world of journalism, Schulz also explained that sharing ideas that are not fully thought out or developed has become acceptable (Tenor, 2018).

It takes time to verify information in modern journalism due to deadlines that come fast. It is easy to notice when journalists make mistakes while reporting the news. However, that doesn't make their behavior acceptable. According to Scott Mayer, a journalism professor at the University of Oregon, better systems are needed to make it easier for people to report mistakes both big and small (Tenor, 2018).

The journalism industry can try to beat social media platforms like Twitter by focusing on being accurate rather than being quick. If you don't do it, magazines and newspapers can lose readers, as we saw with the New York Times, or accidentally spread false information. For people to trust news organizations, the news must be fast and accurate. However, finding the right balance between being fast and accurate is

not as easy as it seems. Newspapers focus more on local flooding events and present the people affected in different ways notes (Bohensky & Leitch, 2014). The media actively helps report on flooding, instead of just watching. Small floods are not included, according to evidence (Gavin et al., 2011a).

Risk is how likely something bad might happen and how bad it could be if it does as describe in (Rothman et al., 2006). The suggested plan could give reliable and similar estimates of the flood conditions very quickly. This is important for getting a better understanding of the situation during a flood and making decisions based on that (Li et al., 2018). The studies show that the media unfairly treats minority groups by making them seem like a danger to the majority groups in terms of safety, money, and cleanliness. Minority groups are shown in the media and talked about by the main group in host countries (Abid et al., 2017).

Disaster management is usually divided into four different stages: Prevention (stopping it from happening), Preparedness (getting ready for it), Response (dealing with it when it happens), and Recovery (getting back to normal afterward) (Bohensky & Leitch, 2014). Community resilience to disasters means the ability to learn from really bad events and make changes to how people and organizations do things (Colten & Sumpter, 2009). The way the media talks about the government's actions during the flood is seen differently by different people. The numbers/ size of the events are increasing, and the federal government is having a harder time dealing with emergencies. Local and regional governments are facing pressure from the community to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme events. Disasters show how governments respond and also change a region's social, economic, and political factors (Liu et al., 2008). How much do these frames represent changes in current flood policy from protection to risk management and the potential effects of adapting to living with flood risk (Devitt & O'Neill, 2017). Climate science also provides important information about the frequency, location, and risks associated with rain and floods, as well as what we can anticipate from global warming (Gavin et al., 2011b).

During floods, people who are in charge of managing disasters often struggle to get a clear understanding of what is happening right now notes (Rodriguez et al., 2007). The United Nations says that flooding in Pakistan is the biggest problem ever for people who need help (Zarqa S. Ali, 2014). Mass media in today's world plays a very important role in efforts to reduce and handle disasters. This is because it has the power to affect how the public thinks and behaves, and this can in turn affect the decisions made by lawmakers (Wolman & Levin, 1984). The Pakistani media has been criticized for reporting irresponsibly, not being objective, focusing on sensational stories, and having political bias in their content. However, we can't ignore the importance of the media's role. The media is very important when it tells people about a disaster situation (Chan, 2017). Some experts believe that the media is very influential in shaping how society thinks and acts. They think that it can encourage people to be more proactive in their approach to life, rather than just reacting to things. Media has the job of creating trustworthy and important information for people.



Exciting news can make people more scared, worried, and confused, which can lead to more problems (Kapoor, 2015). Disaster-warning systems can't work alone. The mass media can collect information from different places and share it with people after making sure it's true (Rodríguez et al., 2007).

During a crisis, people rely on news media a lot and use it to fulfill their needs (Katz, 1959). People found television more informative than other forms of media and used it frequently. Disasters and crises, whether they happened in the past or recently, now rely more on media and communications to be recognized and dealt with (Cottle, 2014). The media in Pakistan does not seem to pay enough attention to climate change issues, both compared to other countries and within the region (Cox, 2012; Zuluaga et al., 2011).

Pakistan's connection with politics makes the relationship between politics and the economy very interesting because people find political news to be engaging and fascinating (Sharif & Medvecky, 2018). Since people rely on the media, it's the job of electronic media reporters to find and give the public accurate information (Iqbal et al., 2014). Many times during disasters, the media only focused on one event and didn't cover other important things happening (Scanlon, 2007). The reason why television is considered effective is that most people watch TV news and Breaking News (Zarqa Shaheen Ali, 2023).

Journalists and news organizations play different roles during disasters, such as giving warnings, evaluating ways to prevent or get ready for disasters, reporting on what happens during them, helping with long-term recovery, and promoting the ability to bounce back from disasters (Houston et al., 2019). The news can help young people understand their role during a disaster and show how they can contribute to their community. They can do this by talking about the things young people are good at and the jobs they can do. They should also include the ideas and opinions of young people (Al-Baldawi et al., 2021).

### **Role of Media in Flood Reporting:**

Many people often rely on mass media for receiving updates about disasters and they also trust the news and information that is shown on mass media. Most people think that the media is helpful when reporting on floods and their effects. Some others believe that the media is usually positive in their coverage of floods. Some people think that the media has a somewhat positive role when reporting on floods. The results show that most people think that the media does a good job covering floods and disasters, and they trust the media as reliable sources of information.

### **Newsworthiness of Flood Reporting:**

During a flood and its aftermath, most people think that the media must cover the flood and its effects. However, they feel that the media is often more interested in political news and focuses a lot on politicians and government officials even when reporting about the flood. Most people rely on the TV to receive early warnings about floods. Most people spend a lot of time watching news channels to find out the most recent information.

### **Responsiveness of the Media:**

Most people think that the media usually or frequently share information about floods and the problems they cause. Some people think that the media only somewhat help with giving information about floods and their problems. No one feels that the media is not helpful during floods and their problems.

Right now, all the news channels, both private and national, have a set of rules they agree to follow. However, they do not have any rules specifically for reporting on natural disasters, even though Pakistan has experienced two very big disasters in the past. We need National authorities to create rules for how news channels report on disasters. These rules should be given to all the channels so that they have to follow them when covering disasters.

Mass media can assist individuals after an occurrence or incident. They can help people affected by disasters and let the public know that disasters could happen again. The media should participate in planning for disasters before they occur. So, their reporting will be improved because they are familiar with the people and plans in the area ahead of time. Emergency managers depend on knowledgeable media professionals to give important information and updates to the public in a clear way.

They also count on them to clear up any false information or rumors. Reporters who work with electronic media need to teach the public about the importance of being prepared for disasters. They can make TV shows, movies, plays, and songs about natural disasters and show the impact they have. Before showing live broadcasts of natural disasters, the electronic mass media should organize activities to inform and educate the public. This program appeals to people who live in a particular place. Reporters tell the stories and experiences of people who were affected by the disaster.

They talked about how important it is to have a life and to be ready for things. Using electronic devices to warn people in advance is very important, but we need to make sure we give accurate and easy-to-understand warnings. To avoid scams and unnecessary panic, we should use reliable sources and explain things clearly. After a disaster, news reporters who use electronic media need to be ready to find out about the current situation of the disaster and check the information they get from the people in charge.





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Reporters should make sure that the information they give is accurate. Reporters need to be nice and caring towards people who have experienced a disaster. They should think about how they would like to be treated if they were in a similar situation. Journalists need to be considerate when talking to survivors and should be trained in knowing when and how to end the conversation respectfully. People who have been harmed are likely to have strong and aggressive responses. You need to stop replying to people who are being harmed or mistreated. First, journalists should try not to ask survivors mean questions and only talk to the victims. Reporters should help people in communities who have been impacted in meaningful ways. They should put kind actions in their messages and give hope to the community.

After a big disaster, journalists should not just talk about how angry people are or how the government can't handle such a huge disaster. Don't say that the government is corrupt and cannot be trusted when it comes to receiving help from within the country and abroad. Journalists need to give information to people, so they know what to do to stay safe. For instance, tell them to be cautious. Because it is not safe, people have to go away from some places. You should not go to places that are not safe. We use methods to make sure the water is safe to drink. Journalists should focus on reporting on the measures the government is taking to keep people safe in the affected area. Journalists do not enjoy going to faraway countryside locations to report on catastrophes. So, the people in the areas affected by the natural disaster don't get the help they need.

Reporters need to be taught and helped so they can understand and describe the harm caused by natural disasters in countryside areas. After a big disaster, the way we get information might not work well. We need to pay attention to problems that affect women, like keeping them safe and healthy. To fix this problem, we can create a radio station that provides important information about giving help to people in need and reporting missing individuals during natural disasters. After a big accident or problem caused by nature, the news and other forms of communication can show the difficult problems that the people who were affected by the event are dealing with. It is important for the media to also be accountable for overseeing and handling donations that come in after a disaster.

They need to make sure that the money used for fixing and rebuilding is used honestly and with transparency. The media should also tell the government to spend money carefully by concentrating on programs that help with recovery instead of wasting money on other projects that aren't necessary. The media should play a role in coordinating assistance by understanding the necessities of the affected people and informing both local and global donors about their needs after a disaster occurs. The media should inform people and others involved about the government's plans to fix things after a problem.

This way, everyone will know that the government is making sure to help the people affected by the problem. When discussing repairing things after a disaster, the media should emphasize the importance of ensuring that the new buildings and structures are safe from future disasters. They need to highlight how important it is to add safety precautions in these rebuilding projects. Media channels show and share an

up-to-date picture of what is happening. They help to share information about dangers or threats. They also help connect people affected by the dangers with the general public. Ask for help, encourage people to assist those who have been affected.

I assisted the government by warning them ahead of time to clear or leave the areas. People don't want to leave their homes or locations. Inform the public about the current state of the victims who are suffering. Some news channels go to offer help to the victims. They show viewers which organizations and government officials are working to help those in need. They want the government to understand that now is not the time for conflict, but the time to assist the victims. Inform the public about how well the provincial authorities are prepared. News channels made the public aware of the extent of damage caused by the disaster. Media reporters often create stories that depict people in distress, making them seem helpless and in a worsened state.

The media always criticize the government for its weak response. Sometimes, reporters give incorrect information about the number of deaths and damage to roads and bridges because they don't have all the facts. They make assumptions and report it as breaking news, which is a big deal. Some news channels are biased and give unfair coverage to political parties, making their donations seem bigger than they are. They found out that the government doesn't work together. The reporters pick places that are simple to report on.

Difficult situations need a lot of hard work. What can't you see? Some channels can't go to the event, so they use videos from other channels to report the news. Journalists often make the situation seem more extreme than it really is.

The reporters paid no attention to the rescue efforts. To get more people to watch, some news channels said that they went to places that the government hasn't gone to yet. Some news channels take advantage of these disasters to promote themselves. Some television channels are showing their team helping people who have been affected by something bad. Other channels have started a special fund to help people quickly and to get more attention for their channels.

This can work well if there is honesty and responsibility. Some reporters talked to politicians to show the help they were providing. It was a good try, but when reporting on a disaster, the reporter should share a neutral point of view about what's happening. The Flood 2022 report found that women are participating actively in reporting about the situation on the ground in the affected area and discussions about rebuilding. But female reporters and anchors focused more on government matters instead of focusing on the most important concerns for women and children in the affected areas, such as health and protection.

### **Objectives:**

- What is the response time to cover environmental disasters during the floods of 2022 in Pakistan. (Immediacy factor)





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- To what extent did the media inform the people stuck in flood-affected areas to move to safe places (responsible reporting)
- To what extent the climate change adaptation issue is being discussed in mainstream media? (Responsible reporting)

The basic objective is to understand the role of media in any type of event reporting, especially in the context of the flood 2022. Whether the media play a role in informing people during the flood in 2022 and facilitating the government machinery or the media started a competition among each other and forgot the responsibility of the new ethics and responsible journalism.

**Research Question:**

What is the fine line between immediacy and responsible reporting while reporting the news related to the 2022 floods of Pakistan.

**The social responsibility theory of the press**

Social responsibility theory states that the media should act as a platform for diverse views, be accountable to society and ignore information that incites violence or undermines peace and order while news should be accurate and balanced. This theory also states that being an entity media should act in such a way to protect public rights. The media in the US acted irresponsibly in 1995 and claimed that patients who took calcium for high blood pressure had a 60 percent increased risk of heart attack, a news that not only created fear. Rather, it forced many of them to avoid such treatment. Therefore, this theory is most relevant to the present study because the social responsibility theory of the press emphasized journalists and the media to play their role in society according to ethics.

## **Methodology**

The basic objective of the study is to investigate ethical issues in television news channels' live reporting of an event of flood 2022 to provide an outline to all stakeholders to wipe out or at least reduce such issues in the larger interest of the public. We have adopted a qualitative research design to find out the possible results of this study. We have applied quantitative content analysis of television news channels to explore ethical issues in live reporting of the event. This study is about to investigate ethical issues in television live reporting of a flood in 2022 and for the study, five television news channels of Pakistan have been taken as population. News reports of these news channels will be a unit of analysis for this study. We have selected one event, i.e. Flood 2022, commonly covered by these five news channels and utilized convenient sampling for the collection of data and the selected one event as a sampling frame for this study.

This study is the content analysis of 5 Pakistani news channels i.e. Geo News, ARY News, Aaj News, Express News, and Hum News during the period of flood 2022 from 16 July to 15 August 2022. We will review the selected news bulletin of these five news channels and analyze whether they follow the ethics or due to pressure and competition of breaking news they set aside the ethics of news and did biased reporting of the flood event of 2022.

## **Content Analysis**

According to Krippendorff (1980), content analysis is a research method for establishing reliable and repeatable links between data and context, while Kerlinger, (1973) explained that content analysis is used to study and analyze communication in a quantitative, systematic, and objective way to measure the variables of recorded data. Content analysis of news bulletins focusing on flood reporting can provide valuable insights into how the media covers and portrays flood-related events because it clearly outlines the specific objectives of content analysis. For example, someone wants to understand the frequency of flood-related news, the geographical distribution of flood reporting, the tone of coverage (positive, negative, neutral), or the focus on specific aspects like damage, relief efforts, or causes of flooding. select a sample of news bulletins from different news outlets for a specific time period and ensure that the sample covers a significant period to capture flood events and responses i.e. from 16 July 2022 to 15 Aug 2022. We have created a coding scheme tailored to flood reporting. This framework should include categories and subcategories relevant to the research objectives. These categories are location, severity, impact, cause, response, victim stories, government action, and community efforts.

We have selected the 9 pm bulletin of these five news channels and analyzed the news stories of the flood through an ethical news angle. The basic objective of this time news bulletin was that the majority of the people view television at 9:00 pm bulletin.



## **Sampling and sample size**

Sample selection and sample size are important components of research design, including content analysis. We determine the representativeness and generalizability of the findings. We have selected one news bulletin for every news channel i.e. 9 pm bulletin where the whole day's news stories are collected together and disseminated to the public information at large. The duration of the sample is one month i.e. from 16 July to 15 August. A stratified technique under the umbrella of probability sampling will be used in this study.

## **Criteria for Selection Pakistani News Channels**

In the current study, the electronic media news channels of Pakistan have been selected on the following basis

- Large network of news gathering
- Data bank of information in the archival form of the previous news and events
- Available on all cable networks, digital media, and electronic channels disseminating network i.e. PTCL, Nayatel, world call, etc.
- A huge viewership in Pakistan and abroad
- A good quality signal of broadcast i.e. HD quality
- A massive viewership of news bulletin
- Have a strong confidence in Pakistani society in credibility form

## **Data Collection:**

A quantitative method of data collection has been adopted for this research. Mainstream 5 news channels' 9:00 pm news bulletin from 16 July 2022 to 15 Aug 2022 has been selected to analyze the news stories of the flood from 16 July to 15 Aug 2022. All the news stories of the news channels in the bulletin of selected dates have been categorized and analyzed under the ethical context of journalism. All the flood-related stories of the 9 pm bulletin of the selected five news channels of the one month from 16 July 2022 to 15 Aug 2022 will be gathered and each news story will be analyzed based on five defined ethics that whether they meet the criteria of such ethics of the journalism or not. The data analysis will be based on the four selected attributes of ethics of journalism i.e. accuracy, fairness, sensitivity, and safety. We will analyze the content of all the news stories of the flood reporting on the selected one-month period under the above-mentioned attributes.

## **Data analysis**

The flood-related stories of the five news channels of the 9 pm bulletin from 16 July 2022 to 15 Aug 2022 have been analyzed through quantitative research through

the four developed attributes to define the ethics of journalism. The content analysis of the five news channels' flood stories of the one-month flooding period of 16 July 2022 to 15 Aug 2022 portrays a mixed picture out of which the news channels more or less focus on ethics and developed stories based on accuracy, fairness, sensitivity, and safety however they exaggerated the news and also produce threatening news stories which created fair and chaos among the people of the affected areas.

## Discussion

Flood reporting is an important aspect of journalism because it informs the public about the devastating effects of floods on people's lives, homes, businesses, and infrastructure. However, reporting on floods is also a challenge for journalists as they must balance the need to inform the public while being ethical and sensitive to those affected by disasters. News ethics are a set of principles that guide journalists in their work to ensure that they report accurately, fairly, and with sensitivity to those affected by their reporting. When it comes to flood reporting, news ethics are particularly important as journalists must be careful not to sensationalize the disaster or exploit the suffering of those affected.

One of the key principles of news ethics in flood reporting is accuracy. Journalists should make sure to verify all information before reporting it, especially in fast-paced situations where rumors and misinformation can spread quickly. They should also avoid making assumptions or jumping to conclusions before all the facts are known.

Another important principle of news ethics in flood reporting is fairness. Journalists must ensure that they present a balanced view of the disaster, giving voice to all sides of the story. They should also avoid portraying a particular group of people as responsible for the disaster or as being more vulnerable than others without concrete evidence.

Sensitivity in flood reporting is also an important aspect of news ethics. Journalists should avoid sensationalizing a disaster by using overly dramatic language or images that could be seen as disrespectful or insensitive to those affected. They should also be aware of the impact their reporting can have on the emotional well-being of those who have lost loved ones, homes, or businesses.

Journalists should prioritize the safety of flood victims by avoiding reporting sensitive information that could put people at risk. For example, it is not appropriate to report the locations of people who have been evicted from their homes or to show footage of people in distress without their consent.

In addition to these principles, journalists must also consider the long-term impact of their reporting. Flood reporting should focus not only on the immediate aftermath of the disaster but also on its causes and possible solutions.



By highlighting the root causes of flooding, journalists can help raise awareness of issues such as climate change, deforestation, or urbanization that can increase flood risk. Flood reporting requires journalists to uphold the principles of news ethics, including accuracy, fairness, sensitivity, and safety. By doing so, journalists can inform the public about the devastating effects of flooding while also respecting the dignity and well-being of those affected by the disaster. Additionally, by taking a broader perspective on the causes of floods and their solutions, journalists can help raise awareness of the importance of reducing the risk of future disasters.

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