



## Article

# “Let’s Draw a Line between Dos and Don’ts”: Pakistani Journalists’ Perspectives about the Ethics of Conflict-Sensitive Reporting

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**Abstract:** In conflict-ridden countries, the news media has a pivotal role to perform as an active advocate of human rights and societal peace, as well as a facilitator of conflict mitigation and resolution through the gathering and dissemination of non-partisan information. While today the world witness armed conflicts in more forms than ever before, some countries are more sensitive to conflict and violence—such as Pakistan. The country is recognized as one of the riskiest places for working journalists by virtue of recurrent political, ethnic, and religious conflicts. The Pakistani journalists work in a climate of fear and risks and with opposing groups seeking to influence the news media, which creates more difficulties for them to report unbiased and accurate news to the public. The practice of ethics has become more challenging for the Pakistani journalists because the country lacks an effective and standardized code of conduct to report on conflict. Therefore, drawing on the theory of the conflict triangle by Galtung, this study seeks the Pakistani journalists’ perspectives about the ethics of conflict sensitive reporting. In doing so, this study uses the quantitative method of survey and the qualitative method of in-depth interviews. The study uses descriptive analysis to present the survey findings in the form of percentage and thematic analysis to present the findings of interview data.



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## 1. Introduction

The way news media report on conflict is crucial because it can result in peacebuilding or conflict escalation, especially in conflict-sensitive countries like Pakistan (Jamil 2018; Iqbal and Hussain 2017; Mustafa 2013). Ideally, it is expected that the news media, through their content, must advance interventions that promote and reinforce peaceful coexistence and development. This can be done when the news media are objective and balanced in their reportage of conflicts. The news media can help in developing awareness, mutual understanding, and compassion among relevant stakeholders to compromise in any conflict situation, but only when journalists are “professional and ethical enough to be as faithful” and be aware of their individual attitudes (Amoakohene 2017, p. 29). This paves the way for the news media to be “harnessed by peacebuilding actors” to spread messages that promote peace and develop awareness about conflict mitigation strategies (Eze 2017, p. 6). However, journalists may have their motivations for reporting conflicts. Kotia (2017) posits that journalists may “be controlled or paid by one side or the other in the conflict to manipulate the population through false information or hostile propaganda” (p. 20). This not only undermines the news media’s role as watchdogs, gatekeepers, providers of information, advocates, and peace promoters (Mare 2017), but it also results in the media stroking a conflict with partial reporting.

The uncertainties and fear of the unknown that characterize conflict situations easily heighten misunderstandings and misconceptions that fuel conflicts. Therefore, a peace journalism approach in conflict-sensitive countries (like Pakistan), is needed. Journalists, as peace promoters, have a duty to report on conflict stories in a manner that causes society to consider and appreciate a non-violent approach to conflict resolution (Gadzekpo 2017). Ethical reportage of conflict requires that journalists provide “conflict analysis (i.e., disentangling the kinds of conflict, actors, motivations, and phases and effects of conflict) and “transform conflicts from their violent channels into constructive forms by empowering the voiceless and seeking common ground that unifies rather than divides human societies” (Mare 2017, p. 36). Hence, it is important that journalists identify root causes and understand the scope and impacts of conflicts to provide credible information and earn the public’s trust.

Journalistic values, such as truthfulness and objectivity, are commonly shared and acknowledged in different parts of the world (Hanitzsch 2017). These values prevent them from spreading rumors and unverified information that may escalate the conflict in any context. The ethical principle of balance ensures equal representation of all the factions in conflict and that journalists act with due impartiality and prevent incitement of violence. Additionally, the value of responsibility encourages intersectional and communal approaches among journalists to report on conflict. It discourages trial by the news media, cultural and social biases in reportage, and ensures respect for human rights and democracy. However, it is crucial to recognize that objective, balanced and responsible reporting may not necessarily enable the audiences to fully understand and value non-violent conflict responses. Thus, a purposive strategy is required in the form of conflict sensitive reporting that not only underlines the journalists’ role in conflict resolution, but also in peacebuilding initiatives.

On this premise, informed by Galtung’s conflict triangle (Galtung 1969), this study seeks to examine the perspectives of Pakistani journalists on the ethics of conflict-sensitive reporting. Investigating their perspective would enable the researchers to establish how the Pakistani journalists are negotiating and constituting their role as “agenda-setters and opinion leaders, gatekeepers and advocates, interpreters, disseminators, and adversaries, as well as missionaries and entertainers” (Mare 2017, p. 32) in conflict situations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Overview of Conflicts in Pakistan

Pakistan has experienced several internal and external conflicts since its inception (Jamil 2018; Mustafa 2013) due to a struggle between three critical actors, namely the military, the Islamists, and the civilian wing of the state (Waseem 2011). Hence, Mustafa (2013) describes Pakistan as being “no stranger to conflicts” because it is “a state where different regions are influenced by varying nature of conflicts” that are “deep-rooted and multifaceted” (p. 68). He further adds that “after the occurrence of 9/11 events and Pakistan’s joining hand with the USA forces the War on terror”, Pakistan has witnessed violent conflicts (p. 68). Therefore, Iqbal and Hussain (2017) affirm Mustafa’s (2013) assertion when they indicate that the history of the country has been “marred by a number of political and security conflicts which have worsened with the passage of time” (p. 90). Outlining the major conflicts that have confronted the country, some studies (Iqbal and Hussain 2017; Jamil 2018) have highlighted the ethno-political conflicts in Karachi, the Sunni–Shia conflicts, the Taliban, and the Pakistani Army conflict as well as the Balochistan conflict.

The ethno-political conflicts in Karachi originated from the influx of migrants from different parts of India to Sindh upon the formation of Pakistan in 1947 (Siddiqi 2012). The influx changed the ethnic demography, lingual (DeSouza 2012), cultural, and ethnic nature of Karachi, and led to the domination of Urdu-speaking communities in the bureaucratic and governing structures over the indigenes of Sindh in post-independence Pakistan (Effendi and Hussain 2018). Karachi experienced another wave of domestic migration of

the Pathans in 1960 (Lionel 2008) and that of Afghan refugees in 1979, which deepened the demographic imbalance and turned Karachi into “the economic and political battleground for the residing ethnic population” (Effendi and Hussain 2018, p. 316). Ziring (2004) avers that the political dimension of the ethnic conflicts emerged in 1985 with the formation of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), Awami National Party (ANP), and Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) because these political parties sought to secure the rights and interests of various ethnic groups. This inflamed the brewing ethnic tensions in 1985, 1988, 1992 and 1996 (Yusuf 2012; Ziring 2004).

Unfortunately, sectarian, and religious violence took over from 2008 to 2012 and thereafter (Effendi and Hussain 2018). According to Iqbal and Hussain (2017), “Pakistan tops the list of Muslim countries where sectarianism is on the rise” (p. 94), and the Sunni and Shia sects are the key actors in the sectarian conflicts in the country (Hashmi 2007). In a study of the use of religion in violent conflicts, Hashmi (2007) argues that Sunni and Shia have more to do with the hostility between Islamists and secularists rather than sectarianism. The Sunni population dominates over that of the Shias in Pakistan, and the two sects existed in apparent harmonization until the rippling effect of the theocratic revolution of Iran in 1979 and the issue of the establishment of an Islamic state and enforcement of the Shia law was initiated in 1979. Regrettably, the Sunni–Shia conflicts keep deepening over the years due to attempts by government functions to exploit the conflicts to their advantage rather than punish culprits (Iqbal and Hussain 2017; Kabir 2016; Zaidi 2016; Abbas 2010).

The Balochistan conflict has its root in the history of the repudiation of the Balochistan ruling class to assent their sovereignty to the state after the formation of Pakistan. The struggle between Pakistan and Baloch nationalists started in 1947, when the declaration of Pakistan as an independent state was met with the same act by Khan of Kalat for Balochistan. The main contention between the factions is about the autonomy of the province and the less distribution of financial resources to the province as compared to the other provinces of Pakistan, despite the fact it is the largest province with geo-strategic significance in the country (Akhtar 2017; Hussain and Rehman 2015).

Furthermore, the aftermath of the invasion of Afghanistan by the U.S. marks the origin of the Taliban conflict in Pakistan. Citizens who were pro-Taliban became offended when the Western influence compelled Pakistan to monitor and prevent cross-border intrusion. The militants in Pakistan declared their support for the Taliban in Afghanistan and that resulted in an agitation that sparked the Taliban conflict. Though the Pakistani Army has been able to prevent the intrusion of the Taliban and have most of the tribal areas under their control, peace seems to be a mirage. Challenges that come with displacement, and rehabilitation, among others, persist.

It is important to note that conflicts come with direct and indirect consequences (Mustafa 2013). As a direct consequence, the human cost is realized through the loss of lives, which is often a result of the violence and turbulence that has characterized the four conflicts. The Center for Research and Security Studies in Pakistan indicates that 2001 saw a growing number of casualties due to terrorist violence, which increased after 2006. Their statistics indicate that the total number of lives lost in 2006 was 1471 (consisting of 608 civilians, 325 security force personnel and 538 terrorist/insurgents), and the number of casualties further increased in 2007. Additionally, in 2009, Pakistan experienced 413 bombings and 87 suicide attacks. Current statistics, from Hussain et al. (2021) in their study on the evaluation of war and potential peace from Pakistani news media indicates that more than 65,000 people have lost their lives to the Taliban conflict since 2004. The authors again indicate that the statistics for the Balochistan conflict is more than 8000, that of Sunni–Shia is more than 40,000, while the statistics for the Karachi ethnopolitical conflicts stand at more than 40,000 (Hussain et al. 2021). Aside from the human cost, there has also been social political cost (i.e., displacement of individuals, the associated humanitarian and loss of political authority at the province and district levels), economic cost, agricultural cost, tourism cost, socio-psychological cost, environmental cost, the cost to the education sector and its rippling effect on the development of the state among others.

The journalists' adoption of the war or peace journalism paradigm in the coverage of these major conflicts has implications for local, national, and foreign policies (Hussain et al. 2021). Additionally, it is crucial for journalists to practice ethics in their coverage of conflict as "an intervention tool in peace development and conflict resolution" (Hussain et al. 2021, p. 8).

## 2.2. Paradigms in the News Media's Coverage of Conflicts

The dominant paradigms in the literature on news media coverage of conflicts, are war and peace journalism. These paradigms are "useful heuristic [models] that [are] helpful to understanding different conflict situations" (Mare 2017, p. 35). The war journalism paradigm looks at coverage of conflict from the negative news sells tangent, and it often considers elite sources. Hence, war journalism is characterised by the violent dimension of a conflict, portrayal of win-lose situations, dehumanization of enemies, an orientation of victory, and propaganda, with a focus on elite peacemakers and sources (Galtung 2002). Often, war journalism focuses on treaties and institutions and equates ceasefire to peace and victory. It also adopts a bias us-them approach of overt and covert presentation of "their" lies and "our" untruths, respectively. Therefore, Mare (2017) posits that "professional values such as 'objectivity' and 'balance' mean war journalism is biased toward violence as opposed to context" (p. 34).

It can be argued that these features of war journalism support unethical journalistic practices. Thus, the us-them approach and the implications thereof indicate a partial approach to coverage of conflict because it means the media have taken to the side of a faction instead of being impartial and this is likely to promote communal disharmony and prolong conflicts. So, the dependence of some media groups on the military and a local political party in Karachi for information indirectly caused them to their side. Therefore, Iqbal and Hussain (2017) suggested that the Pakistani journalists covered the Taliban and the ethno-political conflict in Pakistani in a provocative and nationalistic manner.

The portrayal of a win-lose situation and dehumanization of enemies features of war journalism during coverage reveals the inability of journalists to exercise caution in their use of language. Such unethical practice encourages protracted conflict because the dehumanization of the enemy nurtures' retaliation tendencies from the enemy against the victorious faction. Additionally, there are many sides to a conflict, so focusing on only elite peacemakers, elite sources, and public and government officials in the coverage of conflicts often leads to one-sided stories. Such situations undermine the importance of the representation of the voice of all factions in conflict. For instance, Iqbal and Hussain (2017) highlighted that the Pakistani news media relied on press releases from the information wing of the military in their coverage of the Taliban conflict, and therefore, they ignored the voices of the ordinary people. Moreover, Iqbal and Hussain (2017) discovered that the control of one local political party on some media networks caused them to project the viewpoints of the controlling political party and to ignore that of other political parties. This finding was affirmed by Hussain et al. (2021, p. 105) whose study revealed that "patriotic and elite-controlled media produced more escalation as compared with conflict in which journalists were using relatively free media". This resulted in a situation where "constructive investigation into the [conflicts were] denied" (Iqbal and Hussain 2017, p. 102).

The peace journalism paradigm, which is attributed to Galtung (1969), advocates that the media must select and report conflict stories in a manner that causes factions and the society to cogitate and appreciate peaceable options for conflict resolution. It has evolved over the years, and some scholars have given attention to its explanation (Aslam 2016; Lynch 2013) and epistemological basis (Anderson 2015). Peace journalism advocates a balanced approach to the coverage of conflicts. It emphasizes an appropriate use of language that does not incite violence (Ersoy 2006), and ensures "responsible and conscientious media coverage that aims to contribute to peace making, peace keeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, professionals, advertisers, and audiences toward war and peace" (Shinar, as cited by Mare 2017, pp. 35–36). Therefore, Iqbal and Hussain

(2017) established that some major Pakistani media groups employed the peace journalism approach in their coverage of the ethno-political and Sunni and Shia conflicts because they “focused on the causes and contexts of the two disputes, the plight of the victims and explored avenues for peaceful resolution of them” (p. 102). This finding is in consonance with Hussain et al. (2021, p. 105), who discovered “some traces of peace journalism in the reporting of conflict”.

Criticism about the theoretical basis and practicality of peace journalism has been advanced by scholars like Lynch (2007). The criticism borders on departure from traditional values like objectivity and balance which compromises the neutral role of journalists in the coverage of the conflict. However, in debunking these criticisms, Lynch (2013) argues that providing sound background and context of the materialization of conflict is the focus of peace journalism rather than propaganda and violence. Thus, it supports the need to cogitate the context to identify the stakes of factions and distinguish the overt and covert interests and demands, enabling journalists to ascertain actors who support peaceable resolutions and transformational approaches in a conflicting situation (Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al. 2015; Shinar 2009).

This paper is on the premise that adherence to ethical standards during coverage of conflict resonates with peace journalism. Thus, when journalists consider the context of conflicts to ascertain the stakes of factions involved, it offers the opportunity to recognise diverse views and cover conflicts with due impartiality. It also causes journalists to cover the perspectives of all parties involved in the conflict and refrain from publishing content that could incite religious and communal conflicts. Besides, knowledge of sound background and context of the materialization of conflicts offers insights to journalists to use intersectional and impartial approaches in their coverage of conflict to increase communal harmony. Moreover, the identification of overt and covert interests and demands among factions cautions journalists to refrain from social and cultural biases and ensure equal representation. The foregoing is in consonance with the assertion by Peleg (2007) that peace journalism considers conflicts from the problem-solving dimensions. In reference to Pakistan, Jamil (2018) contended that “the role of Pakistan’s media is crucial in representing ... conflicts and in fostering social cohesion and peace in the country” (p. 10). This is because research submits that the media can play an important role in ensuring the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Unfortunately, in the coverage of the major conflicts in Pakistan, instances of war journalism abound more than peace journalism. In their study of how Geo TV and Dunya TV covered the Taliban and ethno-political conflicts in Pakistan, Iqbal and Hussain (2017) discovered that the television news channels employed the war journalism paradigm because they dominantly used exclamatory terms and emphasized the theme of incompatibility and otherness in their coverage. Regarding the coverage of the Sunni–Shia conflict, Zaidi (2016) argued that the Pakistani news media purposefully refused or failed to cover the Shia genocide or reported the Sunni–Shia conflict as non-religious when they gave coverage. This shows that the Pakistani media did not use a news intersectional approach in their coverage of the conflict, and the nature of their coverage could incite or encourage religious violence in Pakistan. Evidence also submits that the privately-owned media organisations gave more coverage to radicals and conspiracy theorists to avoid attacks from them (Ebrahim 2014; Shahid 2014). Such coverage does not support an equal representation of the factions. The foregoing necessitates the need for journalists in Pakistan to adhere to ethical standards in their coverage of conflict-sensitive issues and justifies the thrust of this study.

### 2.3. Model of Conflict Triangle (Galtung 1969)

The model of conflict triangle (see Figure 1) was propounded by Galtung (1969), and it basically explores the impact and causes of conflict. The model indicates that conflicts exist when conflicting contradictions, behaviours, and attitudes exist in a context. Galtung (1969) proposes that a conflict can be considered as a triangle with vertices A, B and C, where A



stands for attitudes, B for behaviour and C for context (See Figure 1). In conflict situations, “attitudes” consist of the perceptions, beliefs, and feelings of factions in a conflict, whereas obvious acts like cooperation, coercion, insults, and provocative statements characterize the “behaviour” of factions in conflict. The “context” vertex is made up of political, social, or cultural interests of parties in conflicts and how these interests clash or contradict. Behaviours are overt in conflict situations, but attitudes and context are covert, and these three aspects of conflicts are interconnected because they influence each other (See Figure 1). Galtung’s (1969) triangle of ABC offers an understanding of the angles and the lens factions in conflict use to consider conflict, as well as the needs of factions involved and the context within which the conflict is unfolding. This offers insight into the motivations of factions in conflict and how structures or systems in place contribute to the conflict.

### The Conflict Triangle

The conflict triangle highlights all the aspects playing a role in a conflict situation.

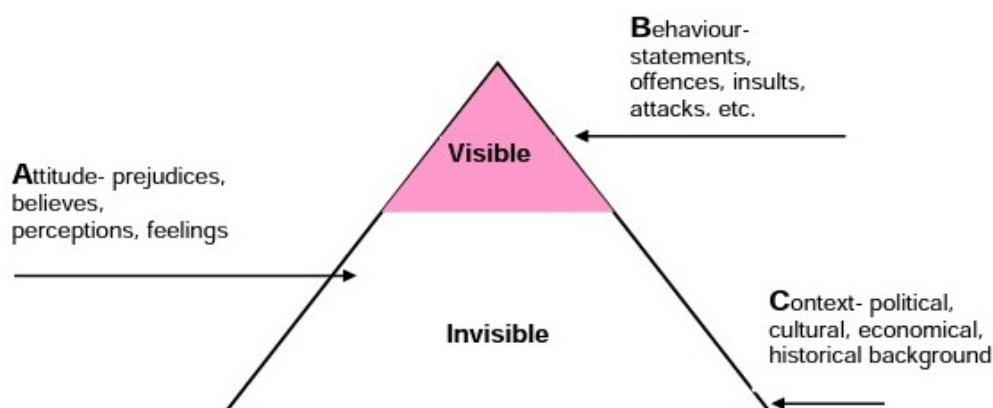


Figure 1. Galtung’s Model of Conflict Triangle (Galtung 1969).

Galtung (1969) avers that conflicts escalate when attitudes of factions involved are hostile and more defensive while accommodating and understanding attitudes lead to peaceful solutions. Thus, conflict resolution can be attained when factions are aware of their beliefs and perceptions of each other. A code of ethics positively regulates the attitude of journalists toward conflict reporting. Adhering to the ethical principle of respect for human rights and democracy causes journalists to be active and dedicated in their provision of accurate, truthful, and balanced information about the conflict between factions. This keeps the factions well-informed enough to be aware of and appreciate their beliefs and perceptions about each other and to enable them to take informed decisions and intelligent choices that lead to peaceful conflict resolution.

Galtung (1969) further notes that attitude influences and affects behaviour in conflict situations. Conflict stories that discriminate or prejudice conflicting factions on political, cultural, or economic grounds breed war journalism and vice versa, peace journalism. The mutual benefits of peacefully resolving a conflict remain a mirage amid conflict reporting that results in insults and provocations. For this reason, the code of ethics requires journalists to desist from social, cultural, or political bias to ensure equal representation of factions and from publishing conflict stories that incite communal violence. This ensures that negative behaviour is avoided, and the possibility of a volatile situation is avoided.

The context, with its contradictions and clash of interests, is the most important aspect of the triangle because it is the environment conflict unfolds and factors within a context that can support or undermine positive conflict resolution (Galtung 1969). This justifies the need to consider contextual influence when reporting conflict. To meet the demand for the provision of truthful and accurate information, journalists must thoroughly research to discover precise and reliable contextual background information as well as the political,

cultural, and social twists, angles and interest in such information. This equips journalists with credible information needed to earn the trust of factions in conflict situations.

Directly or indirectly, journalists become part of the competing factions that can play a crucial role in the resolution of conflicts. Hence, their understanding of a conflict strongly influences how they see, think about, process and report the nature of conflicts. This study is hinged on Galtung's (1969) triangle of conflict because it helps journalists to understand the attitude of involved actors (including themselves), their behaviours, and any contradictions. Understanding these three aspects of the conflict is crucial to practising ethical principles that help reduce the conflict and facilitate peace-building initiatives.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Research Question and Data Collection Methods

This study investigated a research question: what ethical principles of conflict-sensitive reporting are emphasized by the Pakistani journalists? To explore this research question, this study employed a mix-method approach by collecting data through surveys (online) and in-depth interviews (online).

#### 3.2. Survey Sampling, Data Collection Process and Analysis

Using simple random sampling, 100 Pakistani journalists (i.e., 50 male and 50 female) were selected from the country's mainstream news media due to time and resource considerations by the researchers. The purpose of using simple random sampling was to select survey respondents from a large population without any bias. Despite the male dominance in Pakistan's news media, the survey sample thus was selected based on a gender-balance approach to ensure equal feedback from male and female journalists.

The surveyed journalists were of age ranging between 25 and 67 across Pakistan's four provinces including Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as the capital city of Islamabad and Azaad Kashmir. The purpose of selecting journalists, from across Pakistan, was to ensure the ethnic balance among journalists. Therefore, the sample included journalists from five major ethnicities of Pakistan (i.e., Sindhi, Punjabi, Balochi, Pashtu, and Kashmiri). It is important to highlight that the ratio of surveyed female journalists was slightly greater in Sindh, Punjab and Islamabad as compared to Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azaad Kashmir (See Table 1). This is because the selected mainstream news organizations have their major operations in the capital cities Sindh (i.e., Karachi), Punjab (i.e., Lahore) and federal capital (i.e., Islamabad). Most mainstream news organizations have their bureau offices in the capital city of Balochistan (i.e., Quetta) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (i.e., Peshawar).

Moreover, the surveyed journalists were from: four English language's newspapers (i.e., Daily Dawn, The News International, The Nation and Express Tribune); four Urdu language's newspapers (i.e., Daily Jang, Daily Express, Nawa-e-Waqt, and Daily Jurat); six private television news channels (i.e., ARY News, GEO News, Dunya News, Express News, AAB Tak News, AAJ News); and Pakistan Television Cooperation (PTV—the state-owned television channel). In addition to maintaining gender and geographical balance, three more criteria were used to sample the journalists:

- Survey respondents should hold either a bachelor's or a master's degree in Journalism, Media Studies, Mass Communication, or related Social Sciences discipline.
- Survey respondents should possess at least five years or more work experience as a full-time employee at any mainstream news organization of Pakistan. Work experience may include designations including: reporter, news anchor, desk editor, news editor, news producer, bureau chief, controller news, and director news. Table 1. below, explains the demographics of surveyed journalists.

**Table 1.** Demographics of surveyed journalists.

Total number of survey respondents (n = 100)	50	50
Gender	Male	Female
Age range	28–67	25–53
Number of survey respondents from each province/area	Sindh (15) Punjab (15) Balochistan (5) Khyber Paktunkhwa (6) Islamabad (8) Azaad Kashmir (1)	Sindh (15) Punjab (15) Balochistan (5) Khyber Paktunkhwa (5) Islamabad (9) Azaad Kashmir (1)

Initially, a sample of 123 journalists yielded responses from 89 journalists. The follow-up strategy for increasing response rate (Smith and Bost 2007) was then employed to retrieve 11 more responses from the initial lists. Journalists in each province including the capital city of Islamabad and Azaad Kashmir area, were approached to take part in this study. As the first step, journalists in Karachi were contacted (face-to-face) by the principal researcher, who helped to further expand the list of journalists who could be interested in providing their survey responses from other parts of the country. Then, the online survey was administered through Google forms.

This study's survey form was developed using a Likert scale that sought the Pakistani journalists' views about 16 ethical principles that are supposed to guide their reporting on conflict whether offline or online (see Appendix A, Table A1). The 16 ethical principles, to guide the conflict sensitive reporting, have been adopted from the UNESCO's code of conduct on conflict sensitive reporting in South Asia and that was edited by Sadia Jamil, Laxman Datt Pant and Sally Ann Wislon (UNESCO 2021). Table 2, below, explains the 16 ethical principles of UNESCO's code of conduct on conflict-sensitive reporting in South Asia.

**Table 2.** 16 ethical principles of UNESCO's code of conduct on conflict sensitive reporting in South Asia.

Ethical Principles to Report on Conflict Online and Offline	
1	Respect for human rights and democracy
2	Take account of the law
3	Confidentiality of reliable sources
4	Use intersectional and impartial approach to lessen the risk to communal harmony
5	Refrain from social and cultural bias and ensure equal representation
6	Maintain a human rights and gender equality lens
7	Avoid gendered disinformation to ensure respect for all genders
8	Refrain from publishing content that could incite religious or communal violence
9	Accuracy and verification
10	Do not suggest guilt by association
11	No trial by media
12	Exercise caution in the use of language
13	Ensure objective reporting and avoid reporting opinion as fact
14	Act with due impartiality
15	Be accountable for the content produced
16	Avoid welcoming signed documents or ceasefires as something that undeniably leads to the creation of peace

The rationale for using Likert scale, in this study, is its flexibility to evaluate the respondents' opinions and perspectives more closely as they provide their feedback across a scale of options. In this study, the Likert scale sought responses across the scale of 1–5 with options of (1) strongly agree (2), agree (3), no response (4), strongly disagree (5) and disagree (5).



The collected survey data was analyzed using descriptive analysis. The survey data was coded in an Excel sheet and the frequency statistics (i.e., percentage of the responses) was calculated once the coded data was double checked. Frequency statistics basically allowed the researchers (i.e., authors of this article) to count the number of times each variable occurred. In this study, ethical principles listed in the online survey form, were the variables and their occurrences were calculated using the Likert scale. The frequency statistics, in this study, indicated the Pakistani journalists' responses to each ethical principle to report on conflict online and offline, and these statistics have been presented in the form of percentage (See Table 3).

**Table 3.** Journalists' survey response to ethical principles for conflict sensitive reporting in Pakistan.

Ethical Principles to Report on Conflict Online and Offline		n = 100 (n Refers to the Total Number of Surveyed Journalists)				
		Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	No Response 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
1	Respect for human rights and democracy	86%	14%	-	-	-
2	Take account of the law	79%	19%	2%	-	-
3	Confidentiality of reliable sources	88%	12%	-	-	-
4	Use intersectional and impartial approach to lessen the risk to communal harmony	94%	6%	-	-	-
5	Refrain from social and cultural bias and ensure equal representation	100%	-	-	-	-
6	Maintain a human rights and gender equality lens	69%	31%	-	-	-
7	Avoid gendered disinformation to ensure respect for all genders	47%	7%	48%	-	-
8	Refrain from publishing content that could incite religious or communal violence	89%	11%	-	-	-
9	Accuracy and verification	92%	8%	-	-	-
10	Do not suggest guilt by association	62%	-	38%	-	-
11	No trial by media	21%	9%	4%	60%	6%
12	Exercise caution in the use of language	95%	5%	-	-	-
13	Ensure objective reporting and avoid reporting opinion as fact	83%	17%	-	-	-
14	Act with due impartiality	87%	13%	-	-	-
15	Be accountable for the content produced	12%	-	38%	40%	10%
16	Avoid welcoming signed documents or ceasefires as something that undeniably leads to the creation of peace	96%	4%	-	-	-

### 3.3. Interview Sampling, Data Collection Process and Analysis

A total of 20 Pakistani journalists (i.e., 10 male and 10 female senior journalists), of age ranging between 32 and 59, were interviewed for this study. The interviewed journalists were purposively selected to allow the representation of Pakistani journalists from both Urdu and English language mainstream news media organisations (i.e., newspapers and television news channels). The interviewed journalists were from: three English language's newspapers (i.e., Daily Dawn, The News International and Express Tribune); three Urdu language's newspapers (i.e., Daily Jang, Daily Express and Nawa-e-Waqt); five private

television news channels (i.e., ARY News, GEO News, Dunya News, Express News, AAJ News); and Pakistan Television Cooperation (PTV—the state-owned television channel). The rationale for selecting these news media organizations was their nation-wide coverage of news and massive readers/audience reach across Pakistan.

Journalists, for online interviews, were approached by using personal contacts by the principal researcher. Key contacts were used in each news media organization to recruit journalists who were interested in giving an online interview voluntarily. The following three criteria were used to recruit interviewees:

- Interviewee should be of age above 30 years.
- Interviewee should be either a bachelor's or a master's degree holder in Journalism, Media Studies, Mass Communication, or related Social Sciences discipline.
- Interviewee should possess at least 5 years or more work experience as a full-time employee at any mainstream news organizations.

All interviews, in this study, were conducted using Zoom. Each interview lasted for approximately 50 to 60 min and in the English language, which is the official language of Pakistan. Then, all interviews were transcribed word-for-word. As far as the interview guide is concerned, the sampled journalists were asked questions relating to 16 ethical principles thereby to analyze their views about the ethics of conflict sensitive reporting (See Appendix B). The 16 principles were adopted from the UNESCO's code of conduct on conflict sensitive reporting in South Asia (UNESCO 2021). Journalists were asked if they view any of these principles as more relevant to be practiced in the context of Pakistan, how do they see the effectiveness of its implementation, and how do they view their role in mitigating the conflict situation in the country.

Moreover, this study employed thematic analysis to analyze the interview data across 16 themes of the UNESCO's code of conduct on conflict-sensitive reporting in South Asia. The thematic analysis, in this study, followed a three-step process. In the first step, codes were generated based on the keywords in journalists' responses to the research question. In the second step, codes were categorized in two key-themes: (i) most emphasized ethical principles and (ii) less emphasized ethical principles. For the survey data, most emphasized ethical principles were those that were endorsed by more than 70 per cent of survey respondents whereas, for interview data, most emphasized ethical principles were those that were emphasized by most interviewees (i.e., at least more than 15 interviewees). In the final step, sub-themes that were based on 16 ethical principles of UNESCO's code of conduct of conflict sensitive reporting were grouped in the key-themes.

Using data from the survey and the interviews ensures triangulation of findings. Thus, descriptive analysis of the survey findings enables the researchers to employ data aggregation to establish/generalize on the perceptions of Pakistani journalists about the ethics of conflict sensitive reporting then the interview data is used to affirm or refute the survey findings.

### 3.4. Data Validity and Ethics

This study employed the method of triangulation, which refers to the use of two or more research methodologies or theories to investigate and answer a research objective (Flick 2000). In this study, interview and survey data have been used to validate the result. Moreover, to comply with research ethical protocols, all participants of this study were provided with a project information sheet that explained the objectives of this study, methods, participants' voluntary participation, their access to research findings and confidentiality of their names. To ensure the privacy and safety of interviewed journalists, they were quoted anonymously with alphabets (between A to T). In addition, all research participants were asked to sign the informed consent prior to taking part in survey and online interview.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Most Emphasized Ethical Principles of Conflict Sensitive Reporting in Pakistan

Surveyed Pakistani journalists emphasized eleven ethical principles of conflict-sensitive reporting either while working online or offline. Noticeably, 11 out of 16 ethical principles were emphasized by most male and female surveyed journalists and regardless of their age group and work experience. These ethical principles included (See also Table 3):

- (i) Refrain from social and cultural bias and ensure equal representation.
- (ii) Exercise caution in the use of language.
- (iii) Use intersectional and impartial approach to lessen the risk to communal harmony.
- (iv) Avoid welcoming signed documents or ceasefires as something that undeniably leads to the creation of peace.
- (v) Accuracy and verification.
- (vi) Refrain from publishing content that could incite religious or communal violence.
- (vii) Confidentiality of reliable sources.
- (viii) Act with due impartiality.
- (ix) Respect for human rights and democracy.
- (x) Ensure objective reporting and avoid reporting opinion as fact.
- (xi) Take account of the law.

For the ‘most emphasized ethical principles’, interview data considerably validated the survey data. Most of the interviewed male and female journalists stressed (i.e., 16 out of 20) nearly same ethical principles as of survey respondents. They urged refraining from cultural/or ethnic bias, ensuring equal representation of all societal groups, exercising caution in news narrative to avoid incitement of violence and hatred, and to ensure the practice of professional values such as accuracy, impartiality, and truthfulness. Noticeably, none of the interviewed journalists talked about the journalists’ role to sign peace agreements rather they emphasized the implementation of ethical principles when reporting on conflict. For instance, one of the interviewees, a senior female news reporter from an English-language newspaper asserted:

Ideally, we need to practice code of conduct for the conflict-sensitive reporting. We have different national and international codes. Most are based on peace journalism paradigm. However, we need to see how journalists’ attitudes are translated into their behaviors within any specific context. It is crucial then to assess news narrative about any conflict and its broader implications. (Interviewee H)

Another male director of news at a private television news channel, stated:

Caution is necessary to guide journalists’ attitudes and behaviors. We need to see whether our attitudes refrain us from practicing ethical values of accuracy, impartiality, truthfulness, and objectivity. We need to practice caution to avoid anything that affects people’s sentiments, or causes violence and hatred, or damage societal peace. At the same time, we need to ensure the confidentiality of our sources. Hence, a balanced media coverage is crucial in conflict-ridden societies like Pakistan where ethnic, religious and community violence is common. (Interviewee K)

These findings indicated the Pakistani journalists’ inclination towards the practice of peace journalism paradigm, which was largely informed by deontological (i.e., duty-based) and consequentialists approach to ethics. However, some interviewed journalists (i.e., 6 out of 20) highlighted the pervasiveness of journalists’ prejudices and personal biases in the Pakistani news media that fueled political rivalries and ethnic fragmentation in the country on many occasions in the past. According to an interviewee, a female copy writer from an English-language’s newspaper:

We need to break the hegemony of personal believes and prejudices as journalists need to be truly ethical when reporting on conflict. Unfortunately, that is not the

case in Pakistan. You look at TV talk shows, consciously or unconsciously, news anchors and political talk shows' host express their personal feelings and biases. Consequently, we see a never-ending political instability in Pakistan. Same is with ethnic disputes. You take the example of Shia—Sunni conflict of 1988 or ethnic conflicts in Karachi—especially during 1990s. Journalists' partisan reporting of conflict could be observed in the past and even now. (Interviewee O)

[Galtung \(1969\)](#) suggests that it is crucial to assess attitudes (such as feelings, personal beliefs, prejudices and so on) to avoid any behavior that may be deemed as offensive or harmful for others. Additionally, in doing so, it is crucial to see the political, social, and religious context as well. The Pakistani journalists operate in a politically volatile and culturally sensitive context. It is not merely enough for them to consider deontological and consequentialist approaches to ethics. Their individual virtues and moral character can play a significant role in mitigating any conflict and peacebuilding efforts. Therefore, striking a good balance between deontological, consequentialist and virtue ethics, is important for them thereby to perform their journalistic roles.

While the interviewed journalists largely emphasized the same ethical principles as of survey respondents, several interviewed Pakistani journalists (i.e., 11 out of 20) are of the view that mere talking about ethical principles verbally is not enough until it is practiced. For instance, a male news editor at a private television news channel, mentioned:

I know several journalists who talk great about the ethics of conflict reporting, but they violate it on daily basis. I see them emphasizing impartiality, respect for sources' privacy, use of appropriate language, respect for human rights and democracy etc., etc. Trust me, journalists' ethnic and sectarian prejudices do reflect in their reporting. Their behaviors are discriminatory and offensive at times on screen and even off screen. Consequently, Pakistan is in the vivacious circle of political and religious conflicts. Journalists need to practically implement on what is written in the codes to perform their roles as an informer, educator, and advocate in the peace building process. (Interviewee R)

Interview findings suggested a weak implementation of ethical principles to report on conflict in Pakistan's mainstream news media, which could affect their role in conflict resolution and peace building. This indicated the existence of normative standards and journalists' acknowledgment of their cognitive roles (i.e., derived from institutional values, See [Hanitzsch 2017](#)). Nevertheless, the practiced role of Pakistani journalists in conflict resolution and peace building did not appear as strong enough because of less practice of ethics and abidance with laws. For example, a male news producer from a private television news channel, said:

Pakistan has well-defined laws protecting privacy, reputation, ethnic and religious sentiments, as well as journalists' codes of conduct. I think the practice and implementation depend upon journalists' abidance with laws and that their attitudes do not override their sense of responsibility to practice ethics and respect the laws. This is something that goes together. (Interviewee F)

The Pakistani journalists operate in a social and cultural milieu that requires them to be sensitive while reporting on different ethnic and religious groups, and that does necessitate them to practice respect, individual caution, and virtues. Interviewees' feedback further highlighted that the implementation of code of ethics was not just restrained by their apathetic attitude to follow laws, but it was also restrained by safety risks and pressure by diverse groups posed to them. For example, a male news anchor and senior reporter from the state-owned television news channel, stated:

I acknowledge journalists' political and religious fragmentation in Pakistan. They have their individual biases and prejudices as well, and that can be observed quite often in prime-time TV Talk shows. At times, it escalates the conflict. You take example of current political situation in Pakistan. Even journalists are politically divided. However, let me tell you, journalists are not always biased. There

are many occasions when they are threatened to report only one-sided story. Additionally, they do so to save their lives. Then, you can see the gap between theory and practice of ethics. (Interviewee S)

This study highlighted the Pakistani journalists' emphasis for a safe working environment to make sure that they do not report on conflict while being under pressure of any stakeholder. When asked about how ethical principles guide their role in conflict situation in Pakistan, most journalists expressed three key challenges. Firstly, they highlighted safety concerns as a barrier to perform their role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. For example, an interviewee stated, "it is not always safe for us to implement on what is written on paper. Same is with the practice of ethics." (Interviewee J). Secondly, they found Pakistan's laws as clashing with the ethical principles of respecting human rights and that restrained their power as an advocate and a mobilizer in any conflict situation. "Rights to freedom of expression and access to information are often attacked in Pakistan. We cannot be peace advocates, if we do not have right to speak freely and to access reliable information", said an interviewee (Interviewee L). Thirdly, they revealed fragmentation in the Pakistani news media and journalists based on political affiliations, sectarian and ethnic orientations, which nurtures biases and prejudices in conflict reporting. Therefore, ethical principles remain a normative standard that is narrated and acknowledged by the Pakistani journalists, but the fragmentation can affect the journalists' practiced role of ethics in conflict situations.

#### *4.2. Less-Emphasized Ethical Principles of Conflict-Sensitive Reporting in Pakistan*

Survey data revealed five less emphasized ethical principles by the Pakistani journalists that are as under:

- (i) Maintain a human rights and gender equality lens.
- (ii) Do not suggest guilt by association.
- (iii) Avoid gendered disinformation to ensure respect for all genders.
- (iv) No trial by media.
- (v) Be accountable for the content produced.

Survey data indicated that male journalists of age group between 50 and 67 responded more to the ethical aspects of: "no trial by media" and "be accountable for the content produced", as compared to male respondents of age lesser than 50 years who did not respond about these ethical principles (See Table 3). Female surveyed journalists had a mixed response. Some agreed regardless of any specific age group, whereas a majority of them did not respond about the aspects of media trial and accountability. These findings indicated the senior male journalists' motivation towards media accountability for the better practice of ethics. Nevertheless, further research is needed to explore the Pakistani journalists' perspectives about media accountability and media trial as far as the practice of ethics is concerned.

Furthermore, females surveyed emphasized more to avoid gendered disinformation as compared to male respondents (34 out of 50 female respondents). However, overall, this aspect was not emphasized by the surveyed respondents and which was concerning. Pakistan is among those countries where human rights are regularly violated, and gender inequality continues to affect the country's women in their personal and professional lives. The country has been "ranked amongst bottom two countries on Global Gender Index (GGI) for the past decade. In 2021, Pakistan has moved down from 151st to 153rd ranking" (Ministry of Planning Development & Special Initiatives 2022, para 4). Considering these facts, the Pakistani journalists need to be gender-sensitive when reporting on conflict. About the gender aspect, interview and survey data did not validate each other. It was found that many interviewed journalists (i.e., 15 out of total 20), regardless of their gender, type of media organizations and experience level, emphasized respecting gender and human rights when reporting on conflict. For example, a female reporter from an Urdu-language's newspaper, asserted:



We need to be gender sensitive which we are not quite often. Many journalists, perhaps because of their religious beliefs and ethnic background, offend women in their reports and that escalates conflict if it is related to religion or any specific community. (Interviewee E)

A controller news, from a private television news channel, further emphasized media accountability to ensure the practice of ethics. He stated:

Media accountability is not as effective as it should be. We do have right to freedom of expression. However, we cannot weigh this right heavier on other human rights and gender equality. Then, media trials are so common in Pakistan that it makes the situation worse during times of political and religious conflicts. We need to hold the media organizations and journalists accountable to make sure they perform their roles as expected. (Interviewee K)

Media accountability is one way to assess the journalists' practice of ethics from at least three perspectives: their duty, actions that reflect the consequences, and virtues. Nevertheless, unlike the interviewed journalists, many survey respondents did not emphasize media accountability and the journalists' avoidance of doing media trial during conflicts. These findings hence suggested that the Pakistani journalists might not be able to completely practice a peace journalism approach with a lack of respect towards human rights and different stakeholders involved in a conflict. As aforementioned, striking a good balance between different ethical approaches (including deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics) is necessary to make sure that they can perform their roles appropriately.

## 5. Discussion

Journalism, across the globe, is acknowledged as a lever of democracy and the watchdog of the public interest (Jamil and Muschert 2020). The central role of a journalist, is hence to report on the facts accurately so that the public can make informed decisions. Journalists, every so often, perform a key role of information disseminator and opinion makers in conflicts. Probably, that is one of the reasons why journalists are bribed, threatened or even killed (Jamil et al. 2020). Additionally, it is also why journalists are acknowledged as one of the important stakeholders in peace-building initiatives. For the journalists' role in peacebuilding efforts, it is very crucial that they are not biased in their reporting. They need to be objective in their reporting to avoid underrepresentation of any specific group involved in conflict and promotion of any specific agenda. This is how they can enable the public to have opinions based on accurate facts.

In conflict-ridden countries, such as Pakistan, the news media and journalists can play a crucial role to safeguard fundamental human rights, as well as act as a catalyst in conflict mitigation and resolution through objective and unbiased reporting. This study revealed that all the survey respondents admitted to the need to refrain from social and cultural bias in reporting conflict. This indicates that the Pakistani journalists, as advocates of peace journalism, agreed to the practice of a balanced approach when reporting on conflicts. Additionally, the role of journalists as opinion leaders and interpreters was established by the 95% of the respondents who subscribed to the implementation of caution in language that could incite violence, hatred and distress in any specific group or society overall. They did emphasize the respect for confidentiality of sources, human rights, and democracy. However, the quality of conflict-sensitive reporting cannot be just ensured by verbal commitments towards ethical principles. The Pakistani journalists need to adhere to ethical principles practically and beyond personal biases and prejudices. In other words, they need to understand their professional roles in mitigating any sort of conflict and in peacebuilding initiatives.

The traditional role of journalism, in any society, is to empower people to make rational decisions and choices. Hanitzsch (2017) suggests that individual journalistic roles can be understood at four levels: normative, cognitive, practiced and narrated. At a normative level, journalists are expected to perform their work as per the set rules and standards and their role is to meet the desirable standards of the society (Cialdini and Trost 1998,

p. 152). Cognitive roles encompass “institutional values, attitudes and beliefs individual journalists embrace as a result of their occupational socialization” (Hanitzsch 2017, p. 6). Consequently, journalists perform their roles to monitor, inform, critically analyze, educate, advocate, and facilitate. Practiced roles are the ones that are actually “executed in practice” by the journalists (Hanitzsch 2017, p. 9). Finally, narrated roles reflect the “subjective perceptions of and reflections on the roles that journalists carry out in practice” (Hanitzsch 2017, p. 11). The narrative roles thus help to identify the gap between theory and practice.

When analyzing the ethics of conflict sensitive reporting, it is crucial what roles journalists opt thereby to assess their capacity in conflict resolution and peacebuilding measures. This study highlighted a dilemma for the Pakistani journalists. While they emphasized on many internationally and nationally recognized ethical principles of conflict sensitive reporting, they still do not practice all ethical aspects of conflict reporting, especially the ones related to the practice of impartiality, exercise of caution in used language, and the avoidance of media trial. In principle, they are not fully capable of performing their cognitive roles of objective informer, unbiased analyst, and peace advocate because their practiced role is weak. This selective practice of conflict-sensitive reporting ethics, to some extent, makes the journalists adversaries of peace journalism because it undermines their role in setting positive agenda on peace journalism. Thus, Pakistani journalists can only set favorable agenda for peace journalism when they adhere to all the ethical aspects of conflicts reporting.

The Pakistani interviewed journalists, in this study, unfolded two reasons for the gap between the theory and practice of ethics when reporting on conflict. First, there are safety issues that refrain them from practicing the exact code of conduct for conflict sensitive reporting. “There are safety threats by different sources. It may be any state institution, political party, religious or ethnic group, who can pressurize us to report only their side of story. So, we have to compromise on our impartiality”, mentioned an interviewee (Interviewee F). This implies that it is not always journalists’ attitudes (such as individual sentiments, biases, and prejudices) that can result in their harmful behavior and that can aggravate any conflict. Context, within which journalists operate, plays a crucial role as well. Pakistan’s journalists operate in a society that is constantly threatened by violent political, ethnic, and religious conflicts (Jamil 2021b, 2021c). They work in a fearful environment—where political parties, religious and ethnic communities, and powerful societal groups seek to influence news media and journalists in different ways (Jamil 2021a). The matter of concern is how journalist can enable the public to make well-informed decisions about conflicts if they are not safe and empowered themselves with their legitimate rights. Legal frameworks protecting journalists’ rights are thus required to facilitate safe and free work of the Pakistani journalists in both conflict and non-conflict situations.

The second issue is related to the journalists’ training of conflict sensitive reporting in Pakistan, which results in a significant gap between the theory and practice of ethics. For example, an interviewee mentioned, “saying is easy doing is difficult. It is not just enough to talk about ethics. We need to practice it” (Interviewee F). As of now, there are journalistic codes that provide general ethics guidelines. There is no ‘standardized’ code of conduct specifically for conflict sensitive reporting in Pakistan, and which has mutual approval by the state regulatory bodies (such as Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority), journalists’ unions (such as Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists) and provincial-level journalists’ unions or associations. Training of conflict sensitive reporting can give a better understanding of the nature of various types of conflicts, and that can enable the Pakistani journalists to demonstrate sensitivity when reporting on conflicts. Ethnic conflicts usually turn into political disputes in Pakistan. To mitigate its violent impacts, journalists need to be trained about how to strike balance in their reporting so as it leads to conflict resolution. Ethnic conflicts, especially in Balochistan and Karachi, have been impacting social and economic lives of the Pakistani nation for decades. Karachi’s ethnic and sectarian clashes have always been violent (Zaidi 2016). Some studies suggest that the privately-owned media organisations give more coverage to radicals and conspiracy theorists by virtue of

safety threats posed by them (Ebrahim 2014; Shahid 2014). Journalists' training, combining safety and ethics aspects, thus can enable them to report on conflict without compromising on their safety.

Galtung (1969) proposes a model for understanding conflict that has proved useful to journalists. In conflict situations, he emphasizes considering three aspects: attitudes, behaviours and context. Journalists' attitudes (i.e., their feelings, perceptions, biases, prejudices), or actions like insults or proactive statements towards any stakeholder, can result in behaviors that can be harmful to actors involved in conflict. Their peacemaking effort can be challenged if they do not understand the context of conflict (i.e., social, political, economic, and cultural interests of parties in conflict), and how these interests clash or contradict in any conflict situation. This study revealed the emphasis of Pakistani journalists to review their attitudes and behaviors when reporting on conflict. However, they did not emphasize understanding the context of conflict which could affect their capacity to report ethically in a conflict situation. Galtung's conflict triangle (Galtung 1969) suggests to understand a conflict by looking at the contradictions (context) that exist within the societal context that are causing the conflict. It is also crucial that journalists understand the actors' attitudes towards each other and finally how these things play out in terms of their behaviour. This means that the Pakistani journalists do not only need to be ethical in their attitudes and behaviours, rather they really need a proper understanding of actors' attitudes and behaviours who are involved in any conflict. This shall help them to maintain respect for religious and cultural sensitivities during any conflict. Then, they really need to be trained enough to understand the context of conflict to perform their peacebuilding role in a better way.

Galtung's model (Galtung 1969) has useful implications for journalists reporting on conflict not only in Pakistan, but also in other similar contexts. The model thus highlights the need for the Pakistani journalists to understand that their reports can only be comprehensive if they provide a context against which audiences can understand behaviours of actors/or parties involved in the conflict. This implies that it is not only crucial for journalists to maintain self-accountability for their attitudes and behaviours for objective and impartial reporting. Rather they also need to be aware about actors' attitudes towards each other and their histories, which might have shaped the way they view or interact with each other in any conflict. Pakistan's ethnic and sectarian conflicts have long history and different groups have been engaged in conflicts for decades. Therefore, it is crucial for the Pakistani journalists to understand these conflicts holistically, which means getting an understanding of actors' attitudes, behaviours and context (i.e., socio-political and cultural environment that led the conflict, actors' interests and contradictions). When reporting on conflict, thus it is likely that the Pakistani journalists will never be fully able to explain the causes of conflict, but the practice of ethics can help to present perspectives of all parties involved and to give them an opportunity to explain what is happening from their side. This is how journalists can contribute their role for conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives.

## 6. Conclusions

This study unpacked the Pakistani journalists' perspectives about the ethics of conflict sensitive reporting and highlighted their substantial advocacy for a peace journalism paradigm to report on conflict. Nevertheless, there is a gap between the theory and practice of ethics when reporting on conflict among the Pakistani journalists. Some journalists viewed that individual biases and prejudices influence their behavior and resulted in their partisan reporting of conflicts. They also mentioned their lack of understanding towards attitudes and behaviors of different actors involved in the conflict, as well as the context of conflicts in Pakistan. This indicated a challenge for the Pakistani journalists to perform their roles as an objective informer and advocate in peacebuilding process.

Pakistan has a complex political, religious, and cultural milieu. The nature of conflicts is hence complicated as well. Ethnic and religious disputes often become a political issue in

the country; and therefore, it is important for the Pakistani journalists to be aware about the context of conflict holistically. This shall help them to understand the sensitivity of conflict, its causes, implications, and how can they mitigate it through objective and unbiased reporting.

The interviewed Pakistani journalists, in this study, recognized their normative role (i.e., expected as per the set rules and standards) and cognitive roles (i.e., derived from shared institutional values) of informer, educator, mobilizer and advocate in conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives. However, this study manifested their weak practiced role and indicated a gap between the theory and practice of ethics as far as conflict sensitive reporting is concerned. Therefore, in principle, the Pakistani journalists are expected to maintain a good balance of duty ethics (i.e., deontological approach), action ethics (i.e., consequentialist approach) and moral ethics (i.e., virtue approach) when implementing on ethical principles. Particularly, they need to avoid incorporating their personal opinions or perceptions in the news stories they prepare for publication or broadcast. There are separate—and clearly demarcated—platforms, columns, and pages for their opinions and comments. They can also express personal opinions through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. However, as a professional journalist, they should abide with ethical protocols when talking about conflicts on social media. This is crucial for the overall credibility of journalism as an institution.

In addition to practice ethics, the Pakistani journalists should go beyond the rhetoric in their conflict reporting. This means they should understand the needs, expectations and demands of actors involved in a conflict, as well as they should be skilled enough to represent different stakeholders' perspectives in their news stories. This can be challenging because it necessitates the Pakistani journalists to go beyond a single source of information and to ensure accuracy of facts shared by different sources. Hence, by talking to a range of people at different levels within any local community, political party, religious/or ethnic groups, they may obtain a better understanding of conflict and its causes.

Moreover, the Pakistani news media industry is expanding in terms of the size and reach of its audiences. The content diversity, offered by mainstream and ethnic news media outlets, have also increased in recent years. Additionally, undoubtedly, journalists and editors in Pakistan, should not underestimate the intelligence of their readers and viewers. The authors argue that the Pakistani viewers and readers cannot be considered as completely media and information illiterate to not be able to identify partisan reporting. People do have access to many international and national news outlets in Pakistan, and they can get information about conflicts from various sources. Thus, the Pakistani journalists are expected to allow verified facts to speak for themselves. All they can add are a few words to explain the context and background to news stories. Finally, the role of editors is more crucial. Since they are essentially gatekeepers, they need to be extremely careful about the possible use and misuse of emotive or provocative words, for the sake of ensuring accuracy and impartiality. Internal oversight mechanisms, such as the reviews of the Ombudsman, could be a handy tool for editors. These are just some recommendations that can help the Pakistani journalists to practice the ethics of conflict-sensitive reporting, beyond mere verbal commitments to ethical principles.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Survey Questionnaire.

Ethical Principles to Report on Conflict Online and Offline Indicate Your Level of Agreement and Disagreement by Circling One Response in Each Row	
1	Respect for human rights and democracy Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
2	Take account of the law Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
3	Confidentiality of reliable sources Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
4	Use intersectional and impartial approach to lessen the risk to communal harmony Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
5	Refrain from social and cultural bias and ensure equal representation Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
6	Maintain a human rights and gender equality lens Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
7	Avoid gendered disinformation to ensure respect for all genders Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
8	Refrain from publishing content that could incite religious or communal violence Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
9	Accuracy and verification Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
10	Do not suggest guilt by association Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
11	No trial by media Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
12	Exercise caution in the use of language Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
13	Ensure objective reporting and avoid reporting opinion as fact Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
14	Act with due impartiality Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
15	Be accountable for the content produced Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)
16	Avoid welcoming signed documents or ceasefires as something that undeniably leads to the creation of peace Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), No response (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (4)

## Appendix B

### Interviewee Questionnaire

- What ethical principles or aspects should be emphasized in conflict-sensitive reporting?
- How do you see the journalists' implementation of ethics to report on conflict?
- What is essentially required to guide journalists' attitudes and behavior to report on conflict?
- Do you think journalists' biases and prejudices prevail in the Pakistani news media? If yes, how does it affect conflict reporting and situation?
- How do you see the journalists' practice of ethics to report on conflict?



- Are there any local laws that protect privacy, reputation, cultural and religious sentiments, hate speech, and freedom of expression in Pakistan? If yes, how do you see the journalists' implementation of these laws for ethical reporting on conflict?
- Are there any factors that restrain journalists from the practice of ethics to report on conflict? Pls explain.
- Are there any specific ethical aspects that you consider as not too relevant when reporting on conflict?
- How do ethical principles help in performing your roles in any conflict situation in Pakistan?

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