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Impact of Hierarchy of Influence Model on Reporting from the Conflict Zone: An Assessment of the Journalists' Perceptions

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Abstract: This study fills this gap and examines how various level of the hierarchy of influence model corresponds with the journalists' perceptions and which other influence may be powerful in case of conflict reporting. To get insights into the problems faced by the local journalists in conflict reporting and the media's role in reporting on conflict in today's communication environment, a close-ended questionnaire was developed. A total of 358 journalists were selected for the survey in 14 conflict zones identified in the country. The results show that sampled journalists reporting from the conflict zone are not influenced by their personal beliefs and convictions in conflict reporting. Moreover, we conclude that journalists are influenced by colleagues in other media, competing news organizations, and audiences, friends, and family), who have a significant influence on the journalists' performance in conflict reporting.

Key Words: Conflict Reporting, Journalists' Perceptions, Hierarchy of influence Model

JEL Classification:

Introduction

The freedom of the media is of great significance in news reporting. The research on the professional autonomy of journalists has received prominence over time. Professional autonomy has been argued to be one of the fundamental requirements for effectively practising the profession of journalism (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011). There are numerous studies conducted which have focused on the assessment of forces that limit journalists' news coverage. The pioneering work of Shoemaker & Reese (1996) added to the existing body of knowledge on conflict reporting by presenting the Hierarchy of Influence Model. The author has re-titled

various concepts in the new version of the book "Mediating the Message in the 21st Century" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Since the introduction of the model in 1996 by Shoemaker & Reese, the model has been applied by various researchers, and a significant body of knowledge has been created on the subject. Among these studies, most of the research has been carried out in Europe and in the United States context. Researchers in the field of mass communication are particularly interested in the identification of the factors that shape the news because of the journalists' professional role perceptions and political views (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011).

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Journalism as a profession has different meanings to different journalists as some take it as a noble cause cat, and some take it as passion. In fact, this profession is closely related to the working conditions of this procession and freedom of the press. Regarding working conditions, it is obvious that in every job, satisfaction plays a significant role in carrying out any profession effectively and efficiently. Many research studies proved that working conditions and job satisfaction are positively co-related (Finnegan and Solomon, 1981; Leather et al., 1998; Brill et al., 2001; Newsham et al., 2004; Kinzl et al., 2005 & Newsham et al., 2009)

Pakistan is a land of crisis. Being a developing nation, this 3rd world country is always under macro to a micro socio-political and economic crisis. So here, good journalism is crisis journalism, where a journalist has to cover crisis-related issues. Here peace journalism is a dream. Here the good journalism is crisis journalism.

The profession of journalism is a risky profession in Pakistan, as the country is ranked among the most dangerous state for journalists (Richiardi, 2012). The profession of journalism and the practice of news reporting is further faced with different factors which influence news reporting. The literature shows a wide variety of factors and influences that affect the news coverage in addition to the cited above. One of the influential models is the hierarchy of influence model presented by Shoemaker & Reese (1996) as a theoretical framework. Many authors have used the Hierarchy of Influence Model in their own way; however, the model has been greatly criticized in the literature that the Hierarchy of Influence model is US-centric and it ignores the cultural aspects of the area where journalists are working. The issue becomes more complex when two levels of influences affect each other as Colistra (2008) argued that organizational influence and extra media influence affect each other, and both of them affect media influences which further affect content influence outcomes. The existing studies have only focused on the theoretical aspects of the role of the various levels of influence of the hierarchy of influence

model on news reporting. The existing literature is silent on the relevant studies on the assessment of the perceptions of journalists in case of conflict reporting in the context of Pakistan. So, this study will fill this gap and examine how various level of the hierarchy of influence model corresponds with the journalists' perceptions and which other influence may be powerful in case of conflict reporting. In addition to it, it also adds to the literature the new insights gained from the results of the study on the other influences which may be affecting news reporting in the context of Pakistan's news environment.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the journalists' perceptions regarding the importance of different levels of the hierarchy of influence model in reporting from conflict zones. The proposed research is intended to fill the gap in the literature in the context of war journalism. Studies on the perceptions of the journalists to examine the power of influence of various levels of the hierarchy of influence model vis-à-vis examining influences identified by other studies are scarce. There are studies which have only critically evaluated the model. However, studies to explore the perceptions of the journalist about how these theoretical levels of various influence levels in the context of the provinces of Pakistan are rare. This study, for the first time, attempts to examine how various level of the hierarchy of influence model corresponds with the journalists' perceptions and which other influence may be powerful in case of conflict reporting. The study not only asses to validate the theoretical preposition of the various influences in conflict reporting but also adds to the literature to modify and develop the existing models of the hierarchy of influence in conflict reporting.

Literature Review

Studies have recently focused on the role of the perceptions of journalists and various domains of influence on news reporting. There has been increasing evidence that in addition to the various levels of the hierarchy of influence model as proposed by Shoemaker &

[Reese \(1996\)](#), there are other influences, such as journalists' patriotism which influence conflict reporting. Similarly, conflict reporting has also been found to be affected by factors such as elite-controlled media. A recent study by [Hussain \(2019\)](#) showed evidence that more escalation was observed in patriotic and elite-controlled media than in those types of media which were relatively free. The study further indicated the presence of traces of peace journalism among the sampled T.V. channels in Pakistan. Moreover, it was observed that conflict intensity is associated with more escalation by the News channels.

The growing literature on conflict reporting indicates that journalists' reporting in the conflict zone is not an independent activity. Rather, journalists and their news channels are influenced by the policy of the organizations for whom they are reporting. In a study, [Musa and Yushau \(2013\)](#) highlighted the linkage of Northern Nigerian insurgence to the 'Boko Haram' (*Jamat ul Ahlesunna Liddawat Wal Jihad*). The study used critical discourse analysis to show how the two different channels brought the issues into their news. The findings of the study revealed that the conflict reporting by the two news channels was not fully covered but instead was based on argued to be based on vague reporting and crisis reporting were created, which in turn led to misinforming the audience. So, the journalists are influenced by their media organizations' policy, and the influence on the news reporting by a particular media organization has been found to be an influencing factor ([Reese & Shoemaker, 2016](#)).

The media has also been shown to feed on conflict to take benefit from media competition. Conflict reporting and violence reporting have also been termed as the fodder of the media. It has been argued that in case of conflicts which have more often nationalistic, religious, cultural and ideological flavour, the journalists may be converted into propagandists, which makes them an accessory in the conflict. Similarly, in situations where conflict has links with national interests and security, journalists' objective reporting in crisis management is

limited ([Amakiri, 2007](#)). Studies have also shown that a sense of morality and attachment to emotional prospects often directs the journalist in the area of conflict ([Cohen, 2010](#)).

[Relly and Bustamante \(2014\)](#) found that journalists' perceptions revealed that self-censorship in conflict reporting was strongly influenced by Individual-level influences. On the contrary (Voakes, 1997) showed in a study that despite the fact that individual-level influences have a prominent role in the literature, however, their findings suggest that individual-level influence has the weakest influence as compared to a set of complex social influences.

[Ozgunes & Terzis \(2000\)](#) argued that changes in media ownership, technology, commercialization of media, culture and new media format, interlocking interest between media, business sector, politicians, inherent media ideology, and change in media ownership are the main constraints for resolution of coverage in case of conflict between Turkey and Greece.

Conflict reporting has also been found to threaten the journalists during reporting. [Jamil \(2018\)](#) explored the risk in conflict reporting and found that journalism is a hazardous profession in Pakistan because of topic-specific risk, emotional, physical, social, psychological and financial directions because the journalist feels constraints to freedom and job insecurity. The findings of the study further revealed that in an unpleasant and conflict environment, only 18 per cent of journalists were found to feel safe and compensated with all facilities. It was further concluded that conflict reporting had been ignored in the curriculum in Pakistan's public and private universities, which may have consequences for journalists' safety as peace journalism may be used as a tool to reduce threats to journalists.

There is a vast body of literature concerning the risks faced by journalists during reporting from the conflict zone ([Schneider, 2009](#); [Allan & Zelizer, 2004](#); [Crawford & Davies, 2014](#); [Smith & Higgins, 2012](#); and [Düsterhöft, 2013](#)). There is increasing evidence that conflict journalism

demands a more analytic outlook involving risking ground field reporting. During data gathering and news coverage, routine tasks get reversed, and stricter policy of language under the umbrella of multiple surrounding influences drives a field reporter towards clarification, definitions, assumptions, and empirical indicators. During conflict reporting, the journalists are faced with threats as well as the journalists can create risk for the victims of the conflict and even can play a role in escalating the conflict. This shows that journalists' way of reporting may influence the outcome of the news reporting from the conflict (Grim, 2017). Journalists and editors have faced threats to their safety during reporting the conflict (Højby & Ottosen, 2019), which create threats to the media organizations in the long run as corrective entities to governments.

Similarly, studies have shown that Højby & Ottosen (2017) examined the journalist's key contest of safety in conflict and war areas in the context of both domestic and international views. The study used a well-structured interview of 100 sample respondents of editors and journalists from seven countries. The study focused on the issue of Norwegian and Pilipino journalists. The international conflict with more journalistic coverage and less presence leads to second-hand observation. The finding indicated that reducing conflict spots leads to reducing war and conflict prospects; it affects the quality of future journalism.

Mitra *et al.* (2019) reported in a study that working in conflict zones has led to the death of journalists. According to the study, a total of 530 journalists died during 2012- 2016, as per UNESCO statistics. The most targeted journalists were those working in the print media, radio and online journalists. There has

been evidence that reporting in the conflict zone not only endangers the lives of journalists but also puts the freedom of expression of journalists at risk. A recent study by Jamil (2018) has shown that in the conflict zones of Pakistan, Journalism is physically, psychologically, financially, socially and emotionally a risky profession.

Risks such as safety concerns have also been explored by studies such as Højby (2020) in the Philippines, who examined the differences in threats and dangers to journalists hailing from local areas and those who belong to the city of Manila. It was found that the safety varies depending on whether the journalist is local to the conflict or otherwise.

Methodology

The aim of this section is to provide the methodology related to the journalists' perceptions regarding the importance of different levels of the hierarchy of influence model in reporting from conflict zones. In the first part of the chapter, the universe of research is provided in the first part of the chapter. Journalists are randomly selected from all regions of Pakistan. The sample is randomly selected from the press clubs in the selected conflict zones in each region. Samples are selected from the conflict zones in Pakistan. The sample respondents are selected from the area where religious, sectarian and ethnic conflicts have been the phenomena happening. For data collection, one district from each region is selected. The simple Random Sampling (SRS) technique is used to select the number of journalists. A total of 358 sample sizes are selected. The selected sample respondents are clearly evident from the following table 1.

Table 1. Selected Sample Size from Each Conflict Zone

S. No	Conflict Zone	No. of Journalists	Selected Sample Size ($n_i = n \cdot N_i/N$)
1	Swat	95	09
2	Dir Upper	22	02
3	Dir Lower	26	03
4	Buner	15	01
5	Peshawar	540	54

S. No	Conflict Zone	No. of Journalists	Selected Sample Size (ni = n. Ni/N)
6	Bajaur	34	03
7	Waziristan (N)	24	02
8	Waziristan (S)	15	01
9	Mohmand	18	02
10	Kurram	16	02
11	Orakzai	12	01
12	Karachi	2150	213
13	Gilgit	75	07
14	Quetta	162	16
15	Kohlu	8	01
16	Noshki	12	01
17	Awaran	11	01
18	Mastung	13	01
19	Khuzdar	9	01
20	Dalbanddin	14	01
21	Harnai	10	01
22	Turbat	12	01
23	Panjgur	10	01
24	Gwadar	22	02
25	Loralai	11	01
26	Zhob	14	01
27	Chaman	28	03
28	Pashin	10	01
29	Dera Bugti	10	01
		Total: 3398	358

The sample was randomly selected from the existing news media organizations in each province. The data is collected through a well-structured questionnaire. Moreover, secondary data is collected regarding various information in the conflict zones, such as attacks on journalists, number of casualties, property losses, financial losses, impunity etc. The main sources of secondary data are the Pakistan Press Foundation, Journalism

Pakistan, Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, Press clubs and Media organizations.

Results and Discussions

Based on the literature review, a close-ended questionnaire was developed. In the first part, the demographic information is presented in tables and figures.

Education level of sampled journalist

Table 2. Distribution of the Sample Respondents on the basis of Education Level and Marital Status

Gender	Education Level							Total
	Illiterate	Metric	Intermediate	Graduation	Post-Graduation	MPhil	PhD	
Male	1	3	96	216	12	4	2	334
Female	0	0	2	19	3	0	0	24
Total	1	3	98	235	15	4	2	358

In this study, a total of 358 journalists from the conflict zones were sampled and interviewed

in selected press clubs in 20 different districts. The cross-tabulation of education level and

gender of sample respondents is given in Table 2. The results indicate that majority of the sample respondents are graduates. (235 out of 358). Among the 235 graduate-level journalists, 216 respondents are male. These results confirm that majority of the sample journalists are qualified with some level of degree.

Formal Journalism Education of the Sampled Journalists

The next table shows the distribution of the sample respondents on the basis of education level and formal journalism education.

Table 3. Distribution of the Sample respondents on the basis of Education level and Formal Journalism Education

Education Level	Formal Journalism Education		Total
	Yes	No	
Illiterate	00	01	01
Matric	00	03	03
Intermediate	00	93	93
Graduation	186	49	235
Post-Graduation	16	04	20
MPhil	03	01	04
PhD	02	00	02
Total	207	151	358

The analysis of the data shows that the sample journalists have obtained formal education in journalism. The results indicate that table 3 shows the cross-tabulation of education level and formal journalism education of sample respondents. It is evident that the majority of

sample respondents are graduates (235 out of 358) and have obtained formal journalism education (186 out of 235). Hence, we find that majority of the journalists are educated and have acquired formal education in journalism.

Field of Studies of Sampled Journalists

Next, the Field study of Sample Respondents is shown in figure 1

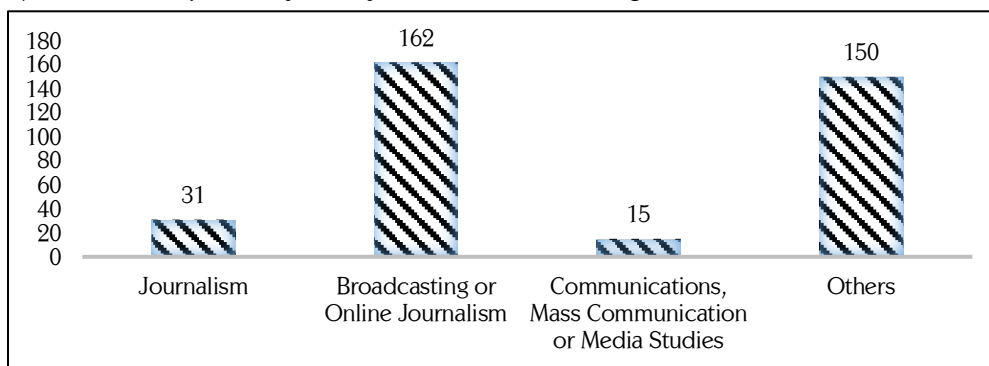


Figure 1: Fields of Studies of Sampled Journalists

The results revealed that a total of 8.7% of the sample journalists responded that they had studied journalism. Similarly, 45.3 % reported having studied broadcasting or online

journalism. While 4.2% stated that they had studied communication, mass communication or media studies. Among the sampled respondents expressed that they had studied

other fields of study. These findings are indicative of the fact majority of the sampled journalists have studied journalism and its allied.

Nature of Conflict Covered by the Sample Respondents

This section presents the nature of conflict covered by the sample respondents.

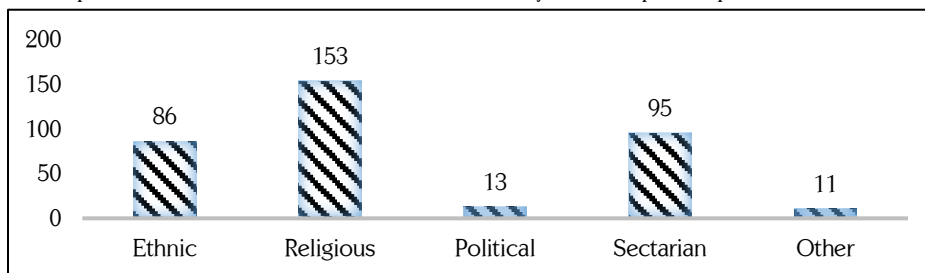


Figure 2: Nature of Conflict Covered

The next table presents the results of the job description and sample journalists' association with the type of Media.

Table 4. Distribution of the Sample Respondents on the basis of Job Description Form and Nature of Conflict Covered

Job Description	Association to Media Form					Total
	Ethnic	Religious	Political	Sectarian	Other	
Reporter	61	126	09	86	6	345
Sub-editor	05	04	1	3	1	4
Correspondent	15	20	2	2	2	7
Other	05	03	01	04	2	2
Total	86	153	13	95	11	358

The data shows that most of the sample respondents are reporters and predominantly cover religious conflict (149 out of 358). Hence, the majority of the sample journalists have a background in reporting. A total of 345 out of 358 journalists stated that they had worked as a reporter in their field. The results further indicated that 86 sampled respondents had been predominantly covering ethnic conflict, 149 sample journalists predominantly covered religious conflicts, 10 sample journalists predominantly political conflicts, and 94 sample journalists predominantly

sectarian conflict (Table 4). These findings are evidence of the fact the sampled journalists have covered the diversified nature of conflicts.

Perceptions of Sample Journalists Regarding Issues in Conflict Reporting

Sampled Journalists' Issues during Conflict Reporting

This section presents the perceptions of the sample journalists regarding the issues during the conflict reporting.

Table 5. Sample Respondents' Perceptions of their Professional attitude in conflict Reporting

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Agreement Index
Journalists do not allow their own beliefs and convictions to influence their reporting.	110	120	48	50	30	0.32
Journalists remain strictly impartial in their work.	73	160	48	37	40	0.26

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Agreement Index
Journalists always stay away from information that cannot be verified.	72	157	45	61	23	0.27
Journalists follow a strict editorial policy of their media group	101	125	34	45	53	0.25
Journalists work for the corporate/ business interest	81	181	22	56	18	0.35

The analysis shows that 230 out of 358 respondents strongly agreed with the notion that Journalists do not allow their *beliefs and convictions to influence their reporting*. Similarly, 233 (65%) out of 358 sampled journalists were found to strongly agree/agree with the notion that *"I remain strictly impartial in my work"*. When the respondents were asked about the verification of information, the majority of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the notion that "I always stay away from information that cannot be verified". It is further revealed from the results that 236(65.92%) out of 358 sampled journalists strongly agree/agree with the statement that *"I follow a strict editorial policy of my media group"*. At the same time, 262(73.18%) out of 358 sampled journalists stated that they strongly agreed/agreed with the notion that *"I work for the corporate/ business interest"* (Table 5). These results indicate that the sampled journalists reporting from the conflict zone are not influenced by their personal beliefs and convictions. Moreover, the findings support the evidence that journalists reporting from the conflict zone were mostly found to be impartial in reporting. These findings are further evidence that journalist autonomy at the individual level

is not restricted in the news reporting from the conflict zone. However, their autonomy is restricted at the level of influence of the organization for which the journalist is working (Sjøvaag, 2013).

The last column of the table presents the agreement indices for a different levels of influence. The agreement index has a value ranging from -1 to 1. A positive value shows a propensity for agreement, whereas a negative one indicates a desire for dissent. The agreement indices for all five items are all positive, demonstrating a proclivity towards agreement. As a result, we infer that the sample respondents agree with the assertions in the preceding table.

Table 6 present the values of Chi-square for all statements of Table 4.8. The Chi-Square statistics (rounded to two decimal places) with asymptotic significant p values are reported. For item 1, "Journalists do not allow their own beliefs and convictions to influence my reporting, the percentage of respondents who agreed differs from the respondents who do not agree, $X^2(1, N = 358) = 73.24, p < 0.05$. A similar pattern for all other items is observed.

Table 6. Results of Chi-Square Test

Questions/statement/item	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Beliefs and convictions of Journalists	73.24 ^a	0.00
Journalists remain strictly impartial in their work.	89.04 ^a	0.00
Journalists always stay away from information that cannot be verified.	64.91 ^a	0.00
Journalists follow a strict editorial policy of their media group	42.25 ^a	0.00
Journalists work for the corporate/ business interest	71.56 ^a	0.00

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 50.0.

Perceptions of the Sampled Journalist about the Influence on Conflict Reporting

In the next section, the sample respondents

were asked about the influence of different factors on the day-to-day job in conflict reporting.

Table 7. Sample Respondents' Perceptions of the Influences on News Reporting

Category of influence	Perceived level of influence				
	Extremely influential	influential	Neutral	Not influential	Not influential at all
Our friends, acquaintances and family	123	114	24	54	43
Readers, listeners or viewers	122	125	21	52	38
Competing news organizations	131	102	25	42	58
Government officials / Administration	128	110	29	38	53
Politicians	122	114	35	37	50
Media laws	123	114	23	55	43
Resources and Equipment	117	129	21	55	36
Pressure groups	123	114	30	41	50
News sources	126	122	23	41	46
Religious leaders	124	104	22	53	55
Advertisers	126	122	27	37	41
Media Watchdog Organizations	128	110	26	35	59

The perceptions of the sampled journalist showed that 123 out of 358 stated that for them, our friends, acquaintances and family influences are extremely influential, while 97 out of 358 stated they are not influential. A similar pattern is observed for the remaining groups such as readers, listeners or viewers, competing news organizations, government officials/administration, politicians, media laws, resources and equipment, pressure groups, news sources, religious leaders, advertisers and media watchdog organizations (Table 7).

Conclusion

Journalism is a risky profession in Pakistan as the country is ranked among the most dangerous states for journalists in the world. Journalism and the practice of news reporting are further faced with different challenges influencing news reporting. The literature shows a wide variety of factors and influences that affect news coverage. One of the

influential models is a hierarchy of influence model presented by Shoemaker & [Reese \(1996\)](#), and this study has adopted it as a theoretical framework. The existing studies have only focused on the theoretical aspects of the role of the various levels of influence of the hierarchy of influence model on news reporting. However, the research work conducted previously on this aspect is silent on the assessment of the perceptions of journalists in case of conflict reporting in the context of Pakistan. Therefore, this study is aimed to fill this gap and to examine how various level of the hierarchy of influence model coincides with the journalists' perceptions and which other influences may be powerful in case of conflict reporting. In addition to it, it also adds to the literature the new insights gained from the results of the study on the other influences which may be affecting news reporting in the context of Pakistan's news environment. This study, for the first time, attempts to examine how various level of the hierarchy of influence model

coincides with the journalists' perceptions and which other influence may be powerful in case of conflict reporting. The study not only assesses to validate the theoretical proposition of the various influences in conflict reporting but also adds to the literature to modify and develop the existing models of the hierarchy of influence in conflict reporting. The findings of this study are expected to yield new insights in the context of Pakistan and will add new insights to the literature in the context of conflict reporting. The study is expected to enhance the knowledge of factors that may influence the journalists reporting from the conflict zones. The study uses the Simple Random Sampling (SRS) method techniques for sample selection. Journalists were randomly selected from all regions of Pakistan. Samples are randomly selected from the press clubs in the selected conflict zones in each region. The primary data was gathered through a pre-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested and modified accordingly before the actual data collection. The data mainly consisted of the variables related to the different items of the hierarchy of influence model.

The results show that sampled journalists reporting from the conflict zone are not influenced by their personal beliefs and convictions in conflict reporting. Moreover, the findings support the evidence that journalists reporting from the conflict zone were mostly found to be impartial in reporting. These findings are further evidence of the fact that the journalists' autonomy at the individual level is not restricted in the news reporting from the conflict zone. However, their autonomy is restricted at the level of influence of the organization for which the journalist is

working. The study findings show that friends, acquaintances and family influences are extremely influential in news reporting for journalists working in conflict zones. Moreover, readers, listeners or viewers, competing news organizations, government officials/administration, politicians, media laws, resources and equipment, pressure groups, news sources, religious leaders, advertisers and media watchdog organizations are influential for journalists working in conflict zones. Hence, we conclude that journalists are influenced by colleagues in other media, competing news organizations, and audiences, friends, and family), who have a significant influence on the journalists' performance in conflict reporting. The findings further reveal that the religious affiliation, ethnicity and origin of the journalists have a significant influence on the news reporting from the conflict zone according to the perceptions of the journalists. It is evident that extra media level influences are perceived with different degrees of the agreement by the sampled journalists. The majority of the sampled journalists were found to be strongly agreed or agreed with the statements that personnel background of the journalist, professional background of the journalist, educational level of the journalist, training of the journalist, the experience of the journalism, personnel background of the journalist and religious sect of the journalist have a considerable influence on conflict reporting. Hence, we conclude that the religious affiliation, ethnicity and origin of the journalist have a significant influence on the perceptions of the journalists. Based on the findings, it is inferred that routine level affects journalists' conflict reporting.

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