

THE PRACTICE OF PEACE JOURNALISM IN THE COVERAGE OF ROHINGYA CRISIS: A STUDY ON BANGLADESHI NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

In modern journalism conflict resolution has become one of the significant issues. This paper evaluates the print media coverage of Rohingya crisis, which is one of the world's most discussed topics in recent years. This study is based on the notion that media has potential to impact conflict prevention and its resolution. Based on their circulation, this study selected four Bangladeshi national daily newspapers. The aim is to examine Rohingya conflict-related news and editorials. The primary results confirmed that the issue's coverage is negatively presented and consistently concentrated on abuse, violent incidents and the lack of peaceful solutions. It concludes that Bangladeshi print media did not play any crucial role in the peaceful resolution of the Rohingya crisis.

Keywords: Peace Journalism, Print Media, Conflict Resolution, Rohingya Crisis.

Introduction

Rohingya crisis is causing damage and untold misery to Rohingya people both in property and life. With the global existence of mass media, people are becoming more up-to-date and see a conflict from multiple angles. War and peace journalism research show that the representation by mainstream media of war is a major problem for armed forces, people and media. In war and peace journalism, media attention forms the course of events.

In addition to governments and international multilateral organizations, like the United Nations and NGOs, media is another major factor that affects conflict prevention and resolution efforts. Advances in communication technologies have reduced the intelligence hegemony of governments and supported individuals and non-state actors in foreign relations, including conflict resolution, to become important partners. In recent times, print media have become a crucial arena of violent conflict, from Iraq to Afghanistan, Kashmir issue between Pakistan and India to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the role of the media has changed dramatically both in conflict resolution and in conflict promotion.

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Peace journalism strives, rather than a mere dichotomy, to reflect on the social and cultural roots of the conflict. It describes the violence, frames the conflict as involving multiple parties and pursues multiple goals. The study analyses Bangladesh's four national newspapers. Two of them are English-language newspapers, and the remaining two are Bengali-language newspapers. Print media were centered as it plays an important role since it helps shaping the political reality, at the same time readers learn about the given issue as well as realize the significance related to it. Thereby, examining whether their coverage has the potential to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the problem, based on the principle of conflict resolution is presented.

Rohingya Issue and Bangladesh

The Rohingya people have experienced ethnic and religious persecution in Myanmar for decades. Hundreds of thousands have escaped to other countries in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The majority have fled to Bangladesh. Since the 1970s Rohingya refugees have come to Bangladesh as illegal immigrants from Myanmar. In 1990s, more than 250,000 resided in refugee camps in Bangladesh. In the early 2000s, only 20,000 were repatriated to Myanmar. As Myanmar's recent conflict has worsened, the number of refugees in Bangladesh has risen dramatically. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 723,000 Rohingya refugees have escaped to Bangladesh since August 25, 2017.

Bangladesh did not have the experience of facing an international crisis such as Rohingya issue in the last two or three decades. Therefore, the advanced media we do have at present did not have that experience to cover such an issue. The study is significant in the context of Bangladesh because, Bangladeshi mainstream newspapers covered the Rohingya crisis with utmost importance. Therefore, it is needed to know whether the newspapers practiced peace/war journalism while covering the issue.

Literature Review

Peace journalism has become an area of interest for communication scholars in recent years, in particular those concerned around the over-reliance of journalists on conflict as a news value. Journalists participating in war and conflict reporting must also make a deliberate effort to adhere to objectivity, a journalistic concept that has been honoured over time. The study, however, shows that war stories reported by the journalists appear to suffer from sensationalism, identification with one side only, and an overemphasis on material destruction and human loss [Allen & Seaton, 1999; Toffler & Toffler, 1994]. This style of reporting has been called war journalism, in which journalists use the language of military victory and the orientation of action to urge violence as a way of resolving even more problems [Lee & Maslog, 2005].

Azad and Jasmine (2013) have explored the efficacy of the sustainability of conventional solutions to the prolonged Rohingya refugee situation in Bangladesh proposed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The researcher argued that the Rohingya refugee solution is based on the political goodwill of all stakeholders (state parties) and that, through the Duty to Protect (global political commitment) to bar genocide and crimes against Burmese Muslims, the UN can play a vital role in applying coercive diplomacy. Three sustainable solutions to end the refugee crisis were addressed in the research, namely voluntary repatriation (not a viable option), local integration (unspoken reality) and resettlement (too little to count). Rahman (2015) discussed the causes of Rohingya's ethnic humanitarian vulnerability. He used qualitative content analysis and collected data from secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, government and non-governmental agency studies, television and newspaper reports. His study shows that the Rohingya people, as stateless refugees deprived of

basic needs, are the least wanted group and the most oppressed in the world. Afzal (2016) investigated in his research, how the editorial opinions of Pakistani, American and British mainstream newspapers covered the Rohingya Muslim crisis and to what extent kept the audience closer to the events by appealing to emotions or pathos. He also analysed how the Myanmar government's treatment of Rohingya crisis was portrayed by the mainstream English language newspapers in a Muslim majority country (Pakistan) and outside the Muslim world by the Western media (Britain, USA).

Awny (2019) examined the framing of Rohingya refugees in India and Bangladesh by analysing two Indian and two Bangladeshi newspapers. In her study she identified five frames: victim frame, intruder frame, responsibility frame, administrative frame, and return home frame in the newspaper articles. Her findings revealed that Bangladeshi newspapers are more likely to use the victim frame while Indian newspapers are more likely to use the intruder frame. The study also found that Bangladeshi newspapers more often feature refugees, spokespersons for NGOs, and other media/journalists as sources, while Indian newspapers more often feature their domestic officials as sources. Lee & Maslog (2005) argue that war journalism is a dominant way of framing wars and conflicts. Wolfsfeld (2004) describes why it is difficult for media to promote peace process. Peace processes and news reporting often contrast by nature. There is an inherent tension between the two processes. The news media traditionally value reporting on urgency, immediacy, threats, and violence. Promoting peace processes requires patience, nurturing and calmness which are not always considered newsworthy.

Methodology

The study used content analysis as a method and conducted with a quantitative and qualitative approach. Quantitative data presented in the table and qualitative interpretation is analysed in the discussion section. This research is based on the theoretical model of Galtung and his classification of peace/war journalism (1986). This study collected news from four national daily newspapers in Bangladesh. Two newspapers from Bengali language and two English newspapers are selected because of their ownership and largest audience. To answer research questions, this study employed content analysis of news in print media, examining the coverage of Rohingya crisis in the Daily Prothom Alo, Daily Star, New Age and Bangladesh Pratidin.

Sampling

Four Newspapers were selected for the study because they are the leading Bangladeshi dailies with the largest amount of circulation and circulated widely across the country [Daily Sun, 2015]. These four newspapers are privately owned, printed in broad-sheets and published from the capital, Dhaka. This study examined the coverage of Rohingya crisis in four selected dailies from August 26th, 2017 to September 26th, 2017. This time period is carefully chosen because it was the first four weeks of the conflict and almost all the newspapers of Bangladesh covered the Rohingya issue with priority during this period. After that, the coverage started to decline and there was not satisfactory amount of news stories to take as sample for this study. The total population of the study is 140 news stories on Rohingya crisis published in all four newspapers during the specified period. 35 news stories were randomly selected from each newspaper.

Research Questions

The above details and an initial evaluation of the coverage of the newspapers led to the following questions emerging:

RQ1: Was war journalism or peace journalism the prevailing structure for reporting the conflict in the Rohingya crisis?

RQ2: Was there a link between the framing of war/peace journalism and story-specific features, such as story form and source?

RQ3: To what percent peace journalism or war journalism does dominate coverage?

Findings

The final sample included 140 news stories, with 35 (25%) news from the Daily Prothom Alo, 35 (25%) news from the Daily Star, 35 (25%) news from the Daily New Age and 35 (25%) from the Daily Bangladesh Pratidin. Prothom Alo published 17 (48.57%), 4 (11.42%) and 14 (40%) stories of war journalism, peace journalism and neutral respectively. Respective figures for the Daily Star were 16 (45.71%), 7 (20%) and 12 (34.8%). New Age published 21 (60%), 4 (11.42%) and 10 (28.58%) stories of war journalism, peace journalism and neutral respectively. Figures for the Bangladesh Pratidin were 27 (77.14%), 1 (2.86%) and 7 (20%). Of the 140 stories, most were byline reports (80 or 57.15%), followed by news agencies (45 or 32.14%) and others were staff reports (15 or 10.71%). The breakdown of the sample by type of stories was as follows: 90 (64.29%) were news stories, 32 (22.86%) were features, 18 (12.85%) were editorials. (Table 1).

	War Journalism	Peace Journalism	Neutral
Number of Stories	81 (57.85%)	16 (11.42%)	43 (30.71%)
Newspaper			
Daily Prothom Alo	17 (48.57%)	4 (11.42%)	14 (40%)
Daily Star	16 (45.71%)	7 (20%)	12 (34.8%)
Daily New Age	21 (60%)	4 (11.42%)	10 (28.58%)
Daily Bangladesh Pratidin	27 (77.14%)	1 (2.86%)	7 (20%)
Types of News			
News Stories	60 (42.85%)	7 (5%)	23 (16.42%)
Features	14 (10%)	6 (4.28%)	11 (7.85%)
Editorials	7 (5%)	3 (2.14%)	9 (6.42%)
Type of News Source			
Byline Reports	54 (38.57%)	10 (7.14%)	16 (11.42%)
News Agency	23 (16.42%)	4 (2.85%)	18 (12.85%)
Staff Reports	4 (2.85%)	2 (1.42%)	9 (6.42%)

Table 1: Story Distribution by Number of Stories, Newspaper, News Type, Source of News Type by War, Peace and Neutral Frame

RQ1: Was war journalism or peace journalism the prevailing structure for reporting the conflict in the Rohingya crisis?

The dominant paradigm for covering the conflict in the Rohingya crisis was war journalism. In all four newspapers, the number of war journalism reports was 81 (57.85%) more than the number of peace journalism 16 (11.42%) and neutral reports 43 (30.71%)

(Table 1).

RQ2: Was there a link between the framing of war/peace journalism and story-specific features, such as story form and source?

The bulk of byline reports were in the war journalism system. In war journalism/peace journalism/neutral contexts, byline stories were as follows: 54 (38.57%), 10 (7.14%), 16 (11.42%) (Table 1). The breakdown of the sample by type of stories in war journalism/peace journalism/neutral frames was as follows: 60 (42.85%), 7 (5%) and 23 (16.42%) were news stories, followed by 14 (10%), 6 (4.28%) and 11 (7.85%) were features. 7 (5%), 3 (2.14%) and 9 (6.42%) fell into the editorials category. In contrast, the proportion of news stories in the context of war journalism was greater than other frames and styles of stories. (Table 1).

RQ3: To what percent peace journalism or war journalism does dominate coverage?

War Journalism Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Visible effects of war	83	29.7
Elite-oriented	82	29.4
Differences-oriented	35	12.5
Here and now	33	11.8
Good vs. bad tagging	15	5.37
Two party orientation (one party win, one party loss)	13	4.56
Partisan-oriented	10	3.58
Zero-sum orientation	6	2.15
Uses of demonizing language	2	0.71
Total:	279	(100%)

Peace Journalism Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Reports on invisible effects of conflict	23	29.5
People-oriented	17	15.2
Solution-oriented	15	13.4
Causes and consequences of the conflict	12	10.7
Avoid good vs. bad tagging	11	9.82
Multi-party orientation	10	8.92
Nonpartisan (neutral, not taking sides)	7	6.25
Win-win oriented	6	5.35
Avoids demonizing language	1	0.89
Total:	112	(100%)

Table 2: Indicators of war and peace journalism (from Galtung 1986)

The frequency of war journalism surpassed peace journalism by a margin of 279-112. The analysis shows that the most common indicator of war journalism (29.7%)

focuses on visible effects. This type of story, mostly hard news, focuses primarily on the conflict and its visible impact on the Rohingya people by giving voice to the soldiers and activists of Myanmar. In other words, the context of the incident and its consequences are not clarified by these stories. The second predictor of common war journalism (29.4%) is the dependency on officials, official sources and elites. For the most part, these sources are politicians, military sources and diplomats. Differences-oriented is the third indicator; (12.5%) of the coverage was found to be of this kind. To build a hazardous enemy picture that is ready to kill, numerous demonizing adjectives and labels have been used. (Table 2).

The study shows that the most common predictor in peace journalism (29.5%) is the invisible effects of conflict. This kind of news focuses primarily on the impact of the conflict, on the Rohingya people and on those who have lost their lives and properties. It dealt with the emotional trauma and potential ramifications of the dispute. The second common measure of peace journalism (15.2%) is people-oriented. This implies impartial reporting by focusing on common people and sees them as the source of information. The third measure focuses on solution-oriented; it was found that (13.4%) of the coverage was of this sort. (Table 2).

Discussion

The coverage of Rohingya crisis in the Daily Prothom Alo, Daily Star, New Age and Bangladesh Pratidin, from August 26th, 2017 to September 26th, 2017 (first four weeks of the conflict) was analysed on Galtung's theoretical model and his classification of peace and war journalism.

The overall coverage was more tilted towards war journalism in four newspapers than peace journalism. This finding is in line with previous research on war and peace journalism, such as stress, conflict, and aggression are covered by the 'default mode of action for the press' [Wolfsfeld, 2004, p. 156]. Shinar finds that even when reporting peace talks, the media continues to use war frames [Shinar, 2004, p. 85]. Fawcett indicates that dispute frames are more appealing to the Irish media than frames of conciliation [Fawcett, 2002, p. 221].

Overall, the ratio of hard news was greater in the coverage, followed by features and editorials. Most stories were bylined followed by the news agency and staff reports. When comparing types of news stories in war and peace journalism frames, all types of stories were more towards war journalism.

The war journalism framework indicators exceeded the indicators of the peace journalism framework. In the war journalism frames, the majority frequency count was "the visible effects" indicator. In the peace journalism frame, the common frequency was "the invisible effects of the conflict" indicator. The most noticeable indicators associated war journalism frame were "elite oriented", "differences oriented" and "here and now". The most noticeable indicators associated peace journalism frame were "people-oriented", "solution-oriented", "causes and consequences of the conflict" and "avoid good vs. bad tagging".

Most stories with a war journalism frame focused on the conflict arena, militant activities, clashes and casualties in Rohingya people tortured in Myanmar, attacks on the Rohingya people, their miserable life while flee away to Bangladesh. In the perspective of demonizing language, The Daily Bangladesh Pratidin and The Daily Star used words such as 'brutal', 'Buddhist extremist', 'nationalist', and 'oppressor' to portray the Burmese army and the Buddhist monks. These two newspapers sampled used more controversial language than the other two. Words like 'violent attacker', 'terrorist', 'militant', 'extremist', 'jihadist', 'evil aggressor' and 'traitor' were found in some reports. On the other hand, among reports from The Daily Prothom Alo and The New Age, victimizing language was used only to describe the sufferings of residents whose identities were not specified.

Words that roughly translate to ‘ambushed’, ‘sacrificed’, ‘innocent civilians’, ‘displaced’, ‘tortured’ and ‘fallen’ were used frequently.

Most news with a peace frame focused on resolutions to the conflict by providing voices to numerous parties involved in the conflict, background and future effects of the conflict and by not taking sides in the conflict. The newspapers specifically focused on the diplomatic efforts by the United Nations and countries, particularly the United States, Canada, Turkey, China and India to defuse the tension and to withdraw forces from the international borders and Rakhine state.

Recommendations

The researcher makes the following recommendations for peace journalism researchers on Rohingya crisis, journalists of Bangladesh who reports conflict issues and universities, who can teach the journalists and students to make them learn the basics of peace journalism.

This research analyses news coverage of Bangladeshi print media. Other researchers need to examine the coverage of the Rohingya crisis by radio, television and online media.

Journalists need to know more about the idea of peace journalism, and this is why academic institutions need to collaborate with journalists’ unions and organize seminars on the fundamentals of peace journalism.

Universities should put the path of peace journalism into the Communication and Media Studies curriculum; and therefore, before graduation, new generations of journalists will be acquainted with peace journalism.

Another suggestion is to create an organization for the region’s peace journalists. Journalists from both sides could come together in this association to collaborate from reporting guidelines. Reporters would be enabled by this organization to practice peace journalism.

Conclusion

This study contributed to the resolution of the Rohingya issue, which was often discussed anecdotally or normatively. The study evaluated the content of Bangladesh’s print media by applying Galtung’s definition of war and peace journalism. Although it is the responsibility of journalists to be ethically correct in their work and objectively and reasonably look for the facts and report the news, it should not be denied that the same story can be told in several ways. It can be inferred, based on the study that the Rohingya issue was not highlighted by the print media with a constructive approach; rather, it was most of the time negatively structured or neutral. Every newspaper has set frames according to their socio-political background when covering the Rohingya conflict and has addressed the issue accordingly and highlighted violence and militancy, nationalism and patriotism, prejudice against some parties, etc. War journalism dominates the coverage of the conflict, which means there is no realization of the importance of peace journalism. Journalists need to know more about the idea of peace journalism and organizing seminars on the fundamentals of peace journalism can help. Journalists should come together and collaborate about reporting guidelines. Reporters should be encouraged to practice peace journalism. Therefore, the study concludes that print media was not used effectively and efficiently for Rohingya conflict resolution and peace-building in the region. On the contrary, the role played by the media was more capable in increasing the intensity of the conflict and eventually to anticipate suggestions for peaceful resolution of Rohingya dispute.

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Appendix

Categories and Guidelines for War and Peace Journalism

War Journalism	Peace Journalism	Neutral
Visible effects of war: Casualties, dead and wounded.	Reports on invisible effects of conflict: Emotional trauma, damage to society, damage to property and culture.	Story that contains none of the two approaches.
Elite-oriented: Focuses on leaders and elites as actors and sources of information.	People-oriented: Focuses on common people as actors and sources of information.	
Differences-oriented: Reports leads to the conflict.	Solution-oriented: Reports leads to solution to the conflict.	
Here and now: Reporting on the war arena.	Causes and consequences of the conflict: Reporting on the causes and future effects of the conflict.	
Dichotomy: Good and bad people or victim and villain.	Avoid good vs. bad tagging: Not labeling anyone.	
Two party orientation: One party wins and one party loses.	Multi-party orientation: Gives voice to many parties involved in a conflict.	
Partisan-oriented: Biased for one party in the conflict.	Nonpartisan: Neutral, not taking any side.	
Zero-sum orientation: One goal: to win.	Win-win oriented: Many goals and issues. Solution oriented.	
Uses of demonizing language: Use of language such as brutal, barbaric, inhuman, extremist, terrorist.	Avoids demonizing language: Report on more precise descriptions, names and titles that the people give themselves.	

(These categories were adopted from the Galtung's (1986) classification on peace/war journalism)