

**EXPLORING SENSATIONALISM IN PAKISTANI  
PRIVATE URDU NEWS CHANNELS  
AN AUDIENCE PERCEPTION**

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**Research Scholar**

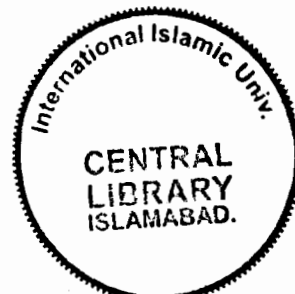
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**INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERISTY ISLAMABAD**

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9-SS/MS-MCS/2008**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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**IN THE NAME OF ALLAH**

**The Most Merciful**

**The Most Beneficent**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this piece of work to Allah Almighty (SWT) and Prophet SAW who brought the message of Allah Almighty which is a complete source of serenity and a Beacon of light for all times, and then to my venerable parents and teachers.

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( **Muhammad Riaz Raza** )

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to document sensationalism in news and current affair programs in private Urdu news channels. Four independent variables-dramatic subject, breaking news, soft news and repetition of events were examined to measure frequency of sensationalism in Geo, Dunya, Express, Aaj, Ary and Sama news channels. The respondents of the study observed sensationalism greatly in these news channels and believe that these channels are sensitizing the issues regarding politics, crime, terrorism, and celebrity etc. Geo News has observed by the majority of viewers as the most sensational channel among all six studied news channels. The study also reveals that Geo has a greater viewer ship and has considered being the most sensational channel at the same time. The results show that these channels are manipulating 'breaking news' frequently. Geo and Express news are top in frequency of breaking news. Results indicate that a reasonable portion of news bulletins is consisted of soft news that is contributing towards sensationalism on these news channels. The variable 'dramatic subject' is denotes to the presence of the category in news items like celebrity, sports, violence, disasters, riots, floods, bomb blasts, drone attacks, crime, drugs, calamity etc. Irrespective of the social and cultural relevance and importance, the channels prefer to present such easily downloadable material.

The results indicate that priority is given to dramatic subjects that create some excitement and drama by sidelining some important and relatively drier subjects like poverty, education, economy, unemployment, environment and health etc. Geo and Express news are most watched news channels and observed as most sensational and biased at the same time. Majority of the viewers are agreed that tone and gestures of the presenter / anchor are sensational. Results show that credibility does link with biasness as majority of the audiences says that most biased channel Geo is considered as less credible at the same time. Dunya news is rated as most credible channel. The population was the viewers from urban and rural areas of Islamabad who have access to cable TV. The data was collected through questionnaire-based survey from 350 respondents by using systematic random sampling technique. The data was interpreted and analyzed by using multi regression test as there were a number of independent variables those were the cause of sensationalism-the dependent variable.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The mushrooming growth of private TV channels in Pakistan in the recent years has multiple positive and negative impacts on people's psychology. However, the audiences have more choices to get their required information from different channels with different approach and angle. Earlier the audiences were obliged to keep themselves informed and entertained by watching the state-run TV channels, PTV and ATV. The access of private independent electronic news media, during the last decade, in local languages was not less than a dream for passive audiences. However, it is very challenging and hard for oneself to be informed and to pick information to gratify ones social and psychological informational needs from the bombardment of information at relatively newer, independent and immature news channels in Pakistan.

The private channels in Pakistan, no doubt has altered the informational needs and consumption patterns of the audiences in a short span of time. TV news channels have been opened to private players about 10 years ago during General Musharraf regime after decades of state control on broadcast media. These players had a level playing field and a rich market about more than 180 million people. These private news channels took advantage of having, comparatively, a relaxed media environment during Musharraf rule. Today, Pakistan has more than 50 private news channels in 12 big languages, and the number is expected to be increased in the next few years (Pemra, 2009). However, on the other hand, media critics consider only a few of them as news channels and the rest are rated as entertainment channels. Literacy and particularly media literacy has not been considered as a basic tool for promotion of an independent and responsible media culture. Media and audiences are in the process of learning the phenomena of news and entertainment which has not yet been understood in its real spirit in this part of the globe. The media owners and democratic forces have yet to be decided about the desirable and healthy direction for both audiences and media owners. Media and its stake holders have to promote a culture of independence in media systems with self regulatory system in its entire business.

The sensationalism in television news is a very recent phenomenon in private news channels in Pakistan as the age of private news channels is less than a decade. The print media in Pakistan has been accused of sensationalism. A number of newspapers come to the scene after the Zia era. With the dawn of democracy in the country in 1988 the mushrooming of newspapers were observed and was flourished under the umbrella of yellow journalism. Most of them were eveningers. Their survival was based on yellow and sensational journalism as most of them were started only to earn maximum profit. They tried to enhance readership through some kind of scandalous and sexual approach in print journalism. The access of private independent electronic news media, during the last decade, in local languages was not less than a dream for passive audiences. Although the illiterate audiences are not fully aware of the sensational techniques which are manipulating by these news channels to mould the opinion of the audiences towards their own or their master's aspirations. According to Vettehen et al. (2006) that "Over the past some decades, news critics as well as scholars have argued that market-driven journalism progressively urges news producers and owners to capture the attention of the audience."

No doubt, increase in media space has increased the interest of the audiences and the audiences are more interactive with private TV media which has never been enjoyed by this part of the region. In the race of commercialization, most of the news channels in Pakistan are being compromising on professionalism by keeping the news away from objectivity to attend the advertiser's demands. In this way media outlet distort reality and facts for making the dull news a 'drama' and by doing this they enhance ratings through grabbing audiences. "The fiercer intra-media competition may lead to sensationalism as a ratings solution." (Rehmat, 2008)

Repeating the events on these channels is a routine practice regardless of the importance and nature of the news story, the channels repeat to catch the attention of the viewers by sidelining some important and culturally relevant issues. Hardly any time slot is given in the news and current affair programs to education, environment or health but the stories of celebrities and their scandals etc are telecast sometimes whole day in news bulletins. Whether, it is sports, education, business, celebrity or economics news, whatever the case may be, the news channels continue to have sensationalist

headlines and commentaries at the cost of accuracy and objectivity. The selection of news stories is also crucial when a news team gives priority to soft news on hard news to attend the advertisers. The audiences have not yet been considered a key stakeholder in the process of making and disseminating news and current affair programs on these news channels. Therefore, the issues remain abstract and audiences may have to be in chaos without reaching at any result. McQuail (2000) of the view that “sensationalism is the use of exciting and even shocking stories, graphics or language at the expense of accuracy to generate heightened interest and excitement.”

We have witnessed of some significant events happened in recent years in Pakistan after the inception of private news channels like, War on terror 2002, Earthquake 2005, Red mosque issue 2007, judicial crises 2007, Media crises 2007, Elections 2008, NRO 2009 and flood 2010. The only common thing while covering all these events, the element of ‘sensational features’ like different camera shots, tone, language, sound, repetition, frequency of breaking news and frequency of soft news etc has been significant. Most of the times, the news is presented in style of views. The common viewer is unable to understand the line between news and views ultimately he/she takes views as news and views do not have the news values. The viewer is remained far away from the actual information lies between the lines of news and views. The emotional and personal attachment of the reporter was also prominent feature in all these news presentations. The anchors are often greedy for interpretation of information regardless of the competencies that requires on the issue. Sometimes they gave out of proportion coverage to insignificant issue which does add to sensationalism.

Patterson (2000) characterizes that “soft news as having sensationalist elements regarding famous personalities, being of a utilitarian nature.” It is constantly noticed that news teams of these channels give priority to news stories which have more sensational elements rather for going to the straight forward and dull news. Most of the times contents of these news stories are related to the ‘pre-framed’ social issues which have great value of sensational material. No doubt ‘soft news’ creates easy way to excite the viewers but this does not inform and explain the whole event.

According to Brian, et al. (2008):

“Due to the ready availability of downloadable soft news content from across the nation and world that local TV news producer could opt to use in their broadcasts rather than doing expensive investigation of local issues.”

The availability of soft news on internet and other donor news agencies might be one of the reasons of presenting huge quantity of soft news on these channels. The news departments of these channels do not like to put themselves in a ‘tiring job’ of investigative journalism and they find it easy to fill the time slot by presenting a human interest story regardless of their importance and utility. Another important variable in making the news sensational on television media is the repetition of news and visuals of the event without any update of the news story for whole day. Sometimes, the development on the event is longer and the anchors start giving personal opinion about the event which creates unrest and chaos. The repetitions of the events are in both visuals and comments regardless of the development on the issue. Communication scholars of the view that visual communication has the power to affect public opinion and it can be used both for negative and positive outcome on audience perception by repeating the images; it depends on the agenda of the media outlet. The public opinion can be changed and altered on some important issues by playing background commentary in a semi factious manner. The private TV news media in Pakistan are bluntly using this technique by hiding some facts and highlighting half truth. The news stories and talk shows are repeated regularly on every news channel. More the news story has sensational values the more it takes the prime time in news bulletins. In between, the media agenda is also working and through repeating the program the media agenda becomes public agenda. These channels put more focus on the sensational elements such as curiosity, excitement and wonder in news items and most of the time, to have these tools; they loose objectivity and accuracy. Resultantly, confusion and fear is the outcome for the audiences which contribute towards sensationalism.

We also discuss more recent phenomena in TV news, ‘the breaking news’, news alert, and some call it exclusive etc. According to Miller and Andrea (2004) that

“breaking news is a story that is an unexpected event important labeled breaking and unscheduled.” Audiences give more attention to breaking news and wait for rapid growth or development of the news story. Many a times, channels telecast the same news clipping even during a whole day without any update which creates panic and irritation among the potential viewers. It is also noted that some channels give minor events which do not have the characteristics of breaking news. The ‘practice’ to make every news as breaking news is just frustrating the audiences. One can observe frequent blasts of breaking news during whole day transmission. Irrespective of the breaking news characteristics these private channels are using this technique to gather the maximum audiences. Since the breaking news is also create panic and unrest among audiences and helpful to make the issue to be sensationalized, the researcher will also examine and study the frequency and nature of the breaking news on these channels.

In this study we have analyzed some variables of sensationalism in TV news stories like: 1) dramatic subject, 2) repetition, 3) breaking news and, 4) soft news. Secondly, there was a comparison among some leading private Urdu news channels about the existence of sensationalism and credibility parameters in news programs.

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

This study was designed to explore perception of the audiences regarding sensationalism in Pakistani private Urdu news channels. The study examined that how frequently these channels sensationalize the issues about politics, terrorism, crime, celebrities, sports, etc. The study also focused that whether and to what extent audiences react to the breaking news practice on these news channels.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

- To document sensationalism in news and current affair programs on private Urdu news channels.
- To reveal audience reaction towards breaking news practice in these private Urdu news channels.
- To reveal the audiences perception towards existence of sensationalism discriminated on the basis of gender, age and education?
- To assess the credibility of the channel in the light of audience perception.
- To develop a paradigm for producing informative and effective news and current affair programs on private Urdu news channels in the light of audience perceptions.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

On the basis of literature review and initial assessment of the specified news channels, the following research questions have been developed:

1. Which channel does audience watch frequently for getting news?
2. Which segment of news and current affair program does audience watch frequently?
3. How does audience perceive sensationalism in news and current affair programs in private Urdu news channels?
4. How does audience react to breaking news in these private news channels?
5. Which one of these news channels is presenting more sensational programs?
6. Whether or not the concept of sensationalism is discriminated on the basis of gender, age and education?
7. Whether or not the credibility bears an association with sensationalism?
8. Which one of these news channels is the most credible for the audience?



#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The study will be of vital importance for Pakistani private Urdu news channels, especially in the present scenario when these channels are enjoying a desirable freedom. The study will also provide information about the preferences and priorities of the channels during covering, selecting and presenting of the news items. It will also provide information on the perception of general audience on exposure, content, format and presentation etc. The study will tell us the responsibility level of these news channels. It will develop a paradigm for presenting effective and useful news and current affair programs according to the informational needs of the audience. It will provide an understanding of 'audiences' attitude towards sensationalism. The study will also helpful to assess the actual informational needs of the society.

#### **1.5 Delimitation of the research study**

The study included general audiences, who had access to cable connections and regularly watched TV news and current affair programs on private Urdu TV news channels of Pakistan. The results of the study cannot be generalized on whole population due to limitations of the sample of Islamabad city.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Concept and Definition of Sensationalism**

David (2005) describes the concept that “the term sensationalism is commonly used in reference to the mass media, critics of media bias all political strips often charge the media engaging in sensationalism in their reporting and conduct.”

It is generally observed that sensationalism has been a popular technique to gather maximum audiences by giving more coverage to shock value news stories. The media outlets focus on attention grabbing or hyped topics regardless of their importance to the general public. They prefer to select such stories which have sensational elements with more dramatic values. Krishnan (2008) cited Amir 2005, that “stories are glorified so frequently on the news that it becomes difficult to differentiate between reality and entertainment. Most often the entertainment quotient is higher than the information value.” These private channels are using the above stated formula in presentation of news. It is a hard task for ‘media illiterate audiences’ to differentiate between news and entertainment. Media teams are always looking for some excitement stuff rather than informative and constructive material.

#### **2.2 Background of Sensationalism**

“Stories about family conflicts, substance abuse, violence, disaster, and other disruptions of everyday life are regarded as more significant to the lives of ordinary people than the traditional political and economic.” (Bird. et al. 1992)

It is frequently observed that the private news channels cover family conflicts, domestic violence, riots, and unrest by sidelining some important issues of the audience interest. The selected issues may have some excited and chaotic elements. Recently media, especially TV media cover bluntly the issue of Pakistani Cricketer Shoaib Malik

and Indian Tennis Star Sania Mirza by exposing some very personal matters. Indian and Pakistani news channels cover the issue out of proportion and gave media hype. They gave extra and undue importance in their main head lines of every news bulletins for weeks.

It is the general perception about the Pakistani news channels that tabloid news is not taken seriously as compare to straight forward news. The studies have shown that sensational news often perceives as less credible and less informative as compare to simple and straight forward news. The common thing among all these private news channels is inclusion of production features to make some excitement in their presentation. To make the news sensational, it is also frequently observed that channels are frequently used sound , color, size of pictures, close ups, camera angles etc in an unusual manner. The studies have shown that audiences do not consider such news as credible and reliable.

### **2.3 Sensationalism in Television news:**

“Sensationalism means writing the truth without unfair bias and personal conceptualization.” (Truth vs Journalism, 2010) The use of language in journalism, specially, in broadcast journalism has great importance and demands special attention. The Urdu news channels are frequently using jargons, slangs, phrases in their daily business. They cover crime stories blindly to explore the feelings and future intentions of the victims by ignoring privacy norms. They eager to cover face expressions of the victims with different camera angles which create more panic and hype about the story. The reporters of the channels, while reporting, are always eager to comment or conceptualize the events according to their own perceptions which creates extra hype and ambiguities to understand the real happenings. Obviously both these elements do amount to sensationalism.

The presentations of soft news like celebrity, sports stars, fashion shows, scandals of prominent figures are mainly focused in their coverage. The disasters like flood, earthquake, fire, volcano, plane crash, train accidents are the favorite topics of the Pakistani news channels. It has frequently observed that news channels do repeat the events with regular follow-ups. In Pakistan, the experience of democracy is generally eyed as a sour and fails experience. The legacy of colonialism and feudal

mindset of its leadership fixed many invisible hurdles for the democratic system. Both democracy and media are complementary to each other. Both have not rooted deep as they can tolerate each other. The role of private TV media since its inception has not much appreciable and most of times media created fake controversies for commercial purposes. Much of nation's precious time has already wasted due to non-institutionalization of media organizations. It is the general perception that media could not play its due role of promotion for democratic values in the country. However, media is now enjoying freedom of expression and the environment for its growth and development is supportive in a democratic system.

Although the age of private TV channels in Pakistan is less than ten years but it is enough to take them root. As we have more than 60% illiterate population in the country, the main source of information to the less educated people is electronic media, radio and TV. The PTV a state control network has been a mouthpiece of government and its agencies since its inception in 1964. The access to private news channels is available only to the people living in urban or busy towns while a large population is living in remote or less developed parts of the country. Obviously, they do not have the facility to view cable network. Although, the rapid growth and development of private news channels in the country will take the rural areas into their net in the next few years. If we analyze the ground reality, the business-cum-media people hijacked the media systems in Pakistan. In this process, media specially broadcast media could not play its due role and could not advocate for democracy and to strengthening the political system in the country. More or less it has been involved in its financial gains and its vested interests. These channels focus on excitement and drama in news programs and they do not give much importance to the core function of journalism 'investigative and informative aspect' that is required for the audiences to build their opinion or consensus on the issue. The channels try to gather maximum audiences to sell them to the advertisers for earning money. However, they cover a number of issues including politics, entertainment, social and cultural but they lack in professionalism. Whether it is developing or developed nations 'free media' and 'true democracy' are complementary to each other. Media must be an advocator for democratic values in the country with its watch dog function.

## **2.4 Market driven Journalism and Sensationalism**

McManus market theory of news production (1994) provides insight into some of these causes. According to him:

“News makers are confronted with conflicting norms in their daily work. On the one hand, their task is to serve the public by informing them about significant events in accordance with traditional norms of proper journalism. However, on the other hand, newsmakers only maintain their advertising revenues in case their newscasts are watched by a considerable proportion of the population.”

Pakistan is a rich market with more than 180 million populations for advertising and business companies. There has been a rapid increase in the need of news and its consumption among the viewers due to the inception of private news channels. Advertising companies drive these channels according to their set goals and wishes; they buy prime time and force the media to do what and how they want to show. Media in general and private channels in particular fulfill the priorities of advertising agencies to earn maximum profit. The main victim in all this process is the ‘viewer’ who wants to have objective information to gratify his psychological informational needs.

One factor for selecting the soft news from online access is to run away from boring job of investigative, objective and comparatively a costly journalism. The channels prefer to download stories from internet to fill the slot and to keep the audiences busy regardless the importance and utility of the information. Pakistani news channels did not cover war events since its start around 2008. Though the media did not allow by Pakistan Army to get the battlefield live but limited access was granted to cover the events but practice of the channels show that they just take video clips from Western media and replay for their audiences. Many a times the gifted story was covered, edited and presented according to national agenda of the donor agency. Media critics are of the view that media outlets give more focus on human interest and exciting stories to grab the audience for commercial gains. Sometimes they sidelined some significant but boring (less entertaining elements) topics at the cost of objectivity just to meet the criteria set by the sponsoring companies.

We may often see the same footages on different Pakistani channels due to the same informational source. The media teams and advertisers are confronting a number of challenges i.e., to keep intact the viewers, to enhance the ratings of the media outlet etc. However, channels must decide whether they should pursue information-rich news stories 'principled on accuracy' or more 'sensational stuffed information' in shape of entertainment at the cost of accuracy. Noble (2009) of the view that:

"There are several news values journalists follow in searching for and reporting stories, including significance, proximity, timeliness, human interest and un-usual nature. It seems TV news focuses exclusively on the latter two at the expense of the rest."

These news channels have the tendency to cover insignificant events by going out of proportion coverage. Recently the marriage of Indian Tennis player Sania Mirza and Pakistani Cricketer Shoaib Malik got out of proportion coverage. Both Indian and Pakistani channels widely covered the issue in sensational way. The news about fashion, models or Hollywood stars could be of great interest for the people of their relative culture but practice of channels shows that this type of stuff is of much value for local audiences regardless of their proximity. Availability of such news stuff effortlessly, might be one of the reasons for selecting soft news in their presentations. The inclusion of a dramatic subject in an item and the increase in the number of camera angles appear to have significant impact in the intensity of sensational material.

It has observed that majority of media outlets compromising on the quality of news they produce. They focus only on their commercial gains and to achieve the same they give truth less and exaggerated episodes of news accounts throughout the day. According to them the quality journalism has not much selling attraction, and they prefer to go for heart breaking stories like disasters, soft and crime news. "Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms". (Media Literacy, 1992) In Pakistan, the literacy rate is low and the audiences are not much sharp to observe the sensational techniques and tools which are being manipulated for enhancing the viewership. The target audiences of sensational stuff are, obviously, the lower class as they have not much knowledge of polity and economy.

## **2.5 Infotainment and media commercialization**

Today's modern news channel is not less than a theatre. It has every thing which a good theater should have, like fun, dance, songs, film, fiction, music and all kinds of soft corners of the subjects. Interestingly, you can find all of these throughout the day. To entertain and to amuse the audiences the channels deliver information in a semi fictitious manner. The news presentations of state run channel (PTV) were so limited and confined to the official point of view and devote its prime time for its ally's orientations. After the inception of private channels the scenario has been changed dramatically. The mushrooming of private news channels has been observed in a short span of time. The maturity level of these media outlets is still in question due to their partiality. The anchor persons do not care much about impartial and balanced way of delivering the information. These private channels can be labeled as infotainment channels. They deliver hard news in shape of soft news. Scandals, excitement, hype oriented events, shocking stories, celebrity news are placed in headlines and give them more time slot in bulletins. By doing this, they don't care of journalistic norms and regulations.

## **2.6 Hard News vs Soft News**

“Hard news is the actual report of what has happened in a simple, clear, and accurate manner. This type of news story never distorts, misrepresents or gives wrong facts. Hard news is facts and statistics. Soft news is explanatory and opinionated one”. (Hard news vs Soft news, 2008)

The presentation of soft news in a huge quantum is a common practice on private news channels. These private channels having short history in the field of broadcast journalism in Pakistan, is facing hardships in taking root. Hurdles in freedom of expression, unskilled media people, business priority over professionalism, government control, media regulations, etc. are the main causes which do not allow the media institutions to be flourished. The financial positions of most of the channels are alarming and they cannot run their business without proper source of funding. Ultimately, they go for cheap thrills like undue projection, hype, vulgarity, soft news

preference, scandals to remain alive in the market. One thing is very clear that if these channels go for investigative and in-depth reporting, there is a chance to avoid speculated journalism as investigative journalism will be useful in shaping of a free and fair media culture.

These private news channels love to prey viewers by continuous flow of soft news. A huge amount of soft news consisting celebrities, social conflicts, crime, unrest, scandals etc are telecasted very frequently. The news channels do not look much different from theatre where audience watch entertaining episodes sitting in relax moods. It does look like news but critics do not rate them as news. Majority of Pakistani private news channels are doing business with cheap thrills with the collaboration of advertising companies - the business and other stake holders of media. The channels remain far away from professionalism which requires mature and responsible journalism. Many a times, news is without news values that waste precious time of the viewer.

“In unstructured societies like Pakistan, where fixing responsibility and holding accountability is not part of media routines, there is considerable damage. Lack of organizational checks, not to mention encouragement, has seen news not only being dramatized but also created with ingredients being added to stimulate public interest.” (Ashraf, 2008)

The critics of the media are of the view that the private news channels want to keep themselves alive in the market, sometimes, at the cost of accuracy and objectivity. They act as they do not answerable to any court of law. Their presentation is consisted, most of the time, of unverified facts. They emphasize on dramatization and fiction perspective of the event and hide the straight, true and dull information on the issue.

## **2.7 Growth and Sustainability of Private Channels**

According to Riaz-ul-Hasan (2010), “Pakistan cannot be considered a sound Media market because there is not enough growth in advertising to sustain it. The ratio of advertising expenditure to GDP is about 0.19%.” In view of the preceding lines, it may predict that in future only few channels will survive and the others will have to



shut down. The main source of generating funds for their day to day business is from advertisements. In Pakistan, ruling class has their own media outlets to cover their misdeeds. Much of government advertisements share goes to their favorites who do according to its wills.

## **2.8 Ethical Differences -Tabloid and Television Journalism**

Kristi (2010) says that “with every type of news, the actual ethical practices come down to the person in charge.” When information is provided in a tabloid way than straighter one, the target audience may be misled about that information. Ultimately the credibility and objectivity may hurt and the user of the information has to be in chaos. The ethical approach is not fully adopted while covering crime, personal, or sex victims in news stories. Scandalous photos and other evidences are being presented which create double shock and problems for the victims. The ethics demands some kind of responsible attitude while giving information to the viewers as viewers believe and trust the news blindly.

## **2.9. Ethics and standards in practice**

“One of the most controversial issues in modern reporting is media bias, especially on political issues, but also with regard to cultural and other issues. Sensationalism is also a common complaint.” (Ethical Codes, 2010) Media bias is one of the burning issues of the modern journalism. Media report and cover political issues in a partial way and sensationalize them regardless of negative effects on the society. However, the media bias and partiality may hurt the credibility of the media outlet. Probably, the focus is on commercial and financial gains by catching maximum audience or readership.

In Pakistan, before the inception of private channels, the need of electronic media authority felt and it became in existence in 2002. Media laws for broadcast journalism have been framed from time to time. Many of them were against the freedom of media. With the passage of time many amendments were introduced / replaced keeping in view the pressures of the media owners / institutions which were demanding full independence. However, the government granted many relaxations to

media and at present media is enjoying much freedom that has never experienced in the past.

The responsibility level of Pakistani channels is deteriorating and poor and we can easily find some examples of irresponsibility on the part of news channels. The news channels are flourishing rapidly in rich market with a literacy rate less than 40%. Majority of the population is illiterate and do not read newspapers and they go for broadcast media; radio and TV. The critics say that media freedom comes first and media laws come later.

Media laws are viewed a hurdle for media freedom in the modern world and they believe in a 'Self Regulatory System' in the media. The media owners and media people must apply a self regulatory system while doing journalistic activities. Social Responsibility Theory works for the system in developed or developing countries where media is enjoying freedom. If we compare between present and past media in Pakistan, in the past, no doubt, present media is enjoying full freedom. They are flourishing in size and its systems so rapidly but there pace is very slow towards the issue of responsibility.

## **2.10 Harm limitation principle**

"Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity. Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes." (Ethical Codes, 2010) Majority of the journalists are eager to give their point of view in commentary on the news events regardless of the requirement. During reporting they often undermine facts through opinionated news reporting. They do not consider the objectivity and accuracy according to the ethical guidelines of the journalism. The channels try to show maximum loss in an event occurred.

The harm limitation theory demands to hide some of negativity aspect of the story for the time being. For example loss of lives may be with held until these confirmed by some reliable sources to avoid any unrest and chaos among the audiences. To avoid negative consequences of full disclosures of the news item, it is better to hold sensitive information for sometime. However, Pakistani news channels try to be a 'news breaking channel' by delivering all the information with evidences in a single

episode. They put the viewer into a 'hot pot' of information regardless of viewer's capacity to consume the information. These channels try to exaggerate and hype the issues consciously to gather maximum audiences. They try to cover social evils and portray victims of terrorism, rape, sex, drugs etc in a dramatized way to generate hype. The audiences witnessed of the victim from tribal area where a woman batted by some men in front of hundreds of men. The video clip played again and again a number of times for weeks.

## **2.11 Self-regulation**

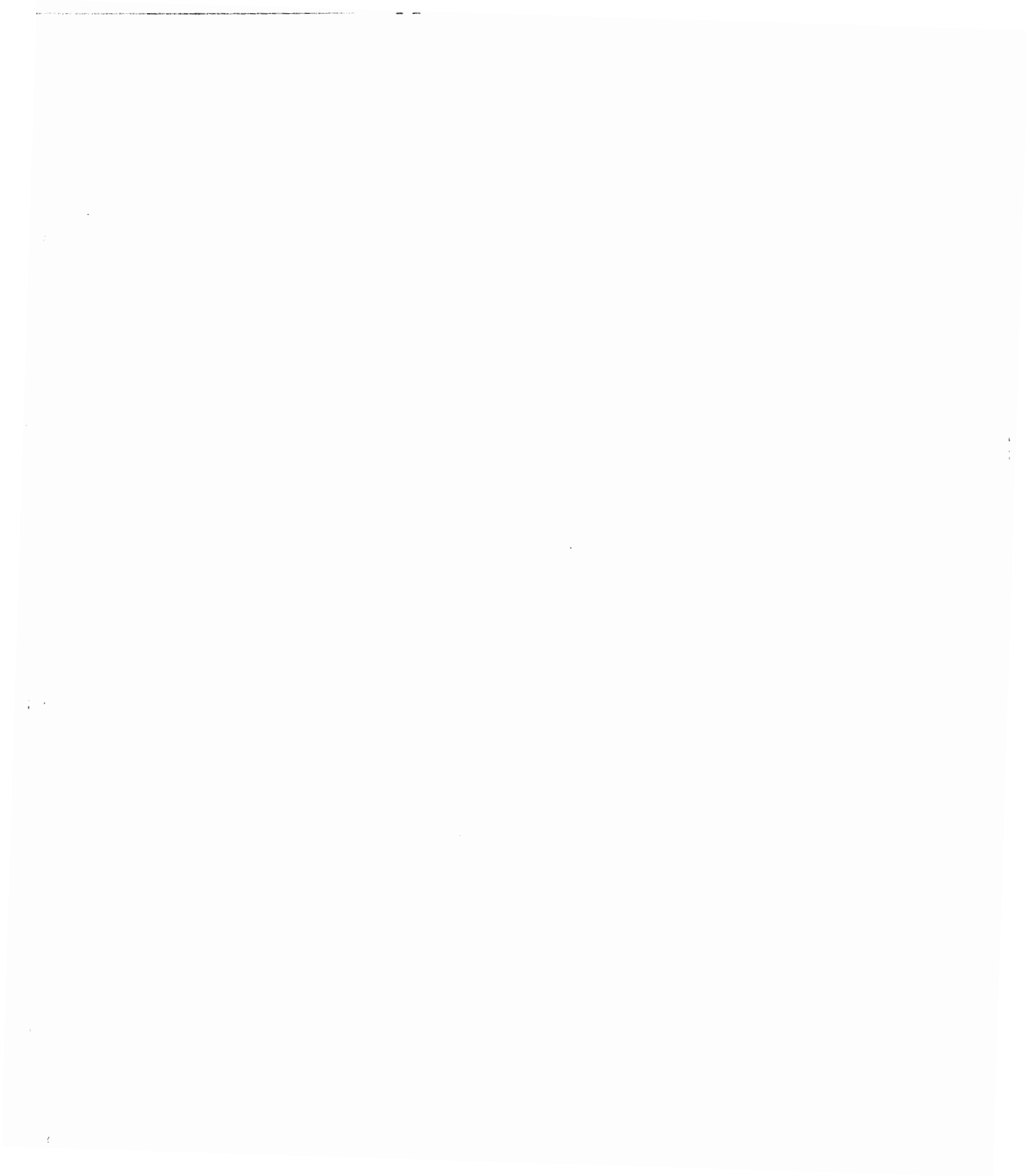
"News organizations maintain an in-house Ombudsman whose role is in part, to keep news organizations honest and accountable to the public. The ombudsman is intended to mediate in conflicts stemming from internal and or external pressures." (Journalism ethics and standards, 2010)

When freedom is taken place the responsibility is an integral part of that freedom. To sustain and secure the freedom there is a need to be more careful for others. In fact Self-regulation is an in-house arrangement among media organizations to foster the journalistic rules and principles during their entire business. The awareness, training, regulations and implementations of such arrangements is not a simple process in a country like Pakistan where education systems and cultural environment is not much helpful in character building of a student. However, media owners and media teams can maintain some level in their journalistic activities. Lack of accountability in institutions has grimed the situation more deplorable. The same environment of 'non check & balance' is enjoying by media particularly private news channels.

## **2.12 Criticism on News Channels for Irresponsible Attitude:**

"Media is under severe criticism due to non professionalism in performing its duties. Episode of 'irresponsible reporting' and negative implications of the electronic media was observed on news channels when it constantly aired news about capturing of government building by some 500 armed militants in Peshawar with the impression of a large-scale operation against the militants. Soon reports about the militants' action and claims about taking the





government staffers as hostages and capturing the building turned out to be false but it created panic and fear in country particularly for the dwellers of Peshawar. Whole drama was demonstrating that city was really under attack from militants and much debated fight to capture town had begun.”

As we noticed that the above said quotation had proved as fake and hype oriented which created unrest and chaos about the incident. A number of such examples we can find during whole day transmission of the channels. No doubt media is enjoying full freedom and independent to cover any news event and hold discussions but it is alarming when some characters in these organizations try to initiate debates to start controversies that may result conflict and chaos in the society.

Professional approach and journalistic responsibility are key features of a good journalist. In democracy, media has the power to mould the opinions of all segments of the society without hurting peace of society. Obviously, it is only be possible with a sense of responsibility. Freedom of expression should only be practiced to highlight problems and issues not to start controversies in the society. Majority of Pakistani channels are used to do such practices and create fake crises those shatter the confidence of the viewer and undermine the promotion of an independent responsible media in the country. In the developed countries it is the prime duty of the media to develop and promote a self-regulatory procedure for accountability to check any irresponsible move through freedom of press.

### **2.13 PEMRA Ordinance 2002**

According to Fatima (2010):

“Proven by the practice of satellite channels that show extensive footage of blood and corpses of the victims of bomb blasts, terrorism and the regional military conflict. This is against the PEMRA Ordinance but all the channels show the bloodshed as sensationalistic ally and with disturbing video and audio content for the purpose of getting more viewership and increasing profitability.”

From the above quotation we can find some examples of irresponsibility from the part of media as they cover more crispy and soft topics in sensationalized way to

grab the maximum audiences at the cost of objectivity. The journalistic responsibilities do matter while covering presenting any issue of the day. Expression of freedom may not be used for ill wills as the time and energies of the people are precious. At the same time there have been some glimpses of media curb from PEMRA. The transmission should not be closed down. In case of any misuse of media organization there should be a system to check and charge the violators. The channel should also show the truth without adding any extra ingredient and should try to avoid out of proportion coverage of an issue.

#### **2.14 Culture of Fear and Chaos to enhance the Viewership**

Whether it is bomb blast or energy crises, the element of fear is a prominent feature of the event on private news channels. The channels are used to present news in a semi fictitious manner and they do not give the whole picture of the news story. Chaos and fear exists in the news bulletins to attract the viewers. The major objective to use such language and pictures is to gather maximum viewers.

Stephens (2007:281) says that "Television news writers have room for fewer words than their counterparts. Most of the news channels have the policy to remain the audience in the culture of chaos and fear. No doubt, it does enhance and grab the audience." As there is enough material of heart breaking for Pakistani media, they do not need to take pain in collection of whole day's news stuff. There are political conflicts, economic crises, energy crises, judiciary crises, water crises, war on terror, relations with India, US and West are some of the burning issues for the last many decades. The media and particularly news channels are rich about the news topics. A bomb blast can provide news material to the channels for whole week as the time is over but the issue is remain abstract.

#### **2.15 Media Circus and Media Hype**

"Media circus describes a news event where the media coverage is perceived to be out of proportion to the event being covered, such as the number of reporters at the scene, the amount of news media published or broadcast, and the level of media hype." (Media Circus, 2007)

Most of the Pakistani news channels are doing 'media circus practice' to get the viewers attention. The channels give out of proportion coverage to the less significant issue. They give hype to the less important issue through 'breaking news'. For example, Mr. Nawaz Sharif gets his boarding pass and he is going towards plane. Is it breaking news? Live coverage is given to Mr. Chief Justice Supreme Court of Pakistan while attending a marriage ceremony. A Press Conference by some opposition members of the parliament whether it is about the sugar or flour crises, these channels cover the event live.

Patterson (2000) notes that "consumers have more choice over whether they get a highly customized presentation that contains only one type of content, which need not be newsworthy, and which need not come from a neutral point of view."

The quantity of soft news during their whole day transmission of these channels is very high. The sports news especially cricket gets lion's share in news. The channels prefer to show celebrity and entertainment news by sidelining some serious issues like education, child labor, women issues, health and environment. Kathryn (2010) believes that "the importance of disasters as defined by television has even reached beyond news coverage and increasingly into entertainment television, as the line between fact and fiction, news."

Shortage of news topics is not a problem for Pakistani channels. Media have a number of new issues daily and they discuss many issues but more time slot is given to politics. We have economic, educational, child labor, women , health, and environmental issues which need special attention of the media but most of the coverage is consisted on politics. Private news channels widely covered War on terror, Earthquake 2005, Red mosque issue, judicial crises 2007, and Media crises 2007, Elections 2008, NRO 2009 and flood 2010. Whether it is Judiciary parliament crises, soft news, celebrity news from any corner of the world or war on terror, the media people get readily available news and related material. They prefer to download it from internet rather going for field or investigative journalism. The responsibility from the channels has not reached at satisfactory level, however, the awareness level of the audiences has been increased and it is increasing with the passage of time.



## **2.16 Credibility and Believability of Sensational stuff**

Burgoon (1978) believes that “credibility of news reporting is another important dimension of the journalistic goal to inform the citizens of a democratic society.” It is also observed that audiences consider standard versions events to be more trustworthy than entertainment version. The studies show that audiences believe in standard and straight news pattern than hyped and tabloid news pattern. They do not trust on tabloid pattern of news and considered it biased and less credible. Entertainment-oriented programs are on-aired frequently without their cultural relevancy. Pakistani private news channels bluntly use tabloid style of news in their presentations of news programs. The believability level of the audiences towards ‘tabloid packaging’ is very low. Critics of news are of the view that the news presents in tabloid style is considered entertaining but less credible.

## **2.17 Media Power: Promises and Pitfalls:**

### **Strengths:**

No doubt the unexpected media increase consisting more than 50 private news channels and about 200 FM stations have positive impact on the Pakistani social system. Due to increase in viewership, the advertisers got much room for advertising. Information providing agencies are so quick in providing in time news to the media market. Resultantly, audiences have more options to get their required information from different media outlets. Due to low literacy rate, a common man turns to television for news and entertainment. They are better informed about the ongoing issues of their country as well as of the world than in the past. These are the strengths of the media powers. The awareness level of the general viewer has increased with a short span of time.

### **Weaknesses:**

The mushrooming of news channels and FM radio stations has negative impact in shape of non-professionalism, lack of standardization, projection of non issues, creation of fake crises, relevancy and utility of information, increase of tabloid version of news, lack of trained media people, increase in soft news and existence of sensationalism and media bias. The other weakness of the present media is intra-media

competition for which they go bluntly even for truth less information in getting big share of viewers.

### **Threats**

The main threat to the culture of freedom of expression is non institutionalization and non access to the public interest information. Due to the environment of secrecy within public offices it is impossible to get true and reliable information. Resultantly, a journalist has to make his story with fake and truth less information. As the literacy rate is very low, audiences can not easily differentiate between fake and true due to the half truth and half lie formula of the media organizations. The majority of the audiences do not have the capacity and power to dictate news agenda. The agenda ultimately set by media teams and media owner by safeguarding their interests. The culture of feed back from the audiences is not encouraged.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study explored two evident forces behind sensationalism, competition and consumer viability. The researcher tried to explore the variables of sensationalism, which were being observed, frequently on these channels like, dramatic subject, breaking news, repetition of news stories and soft news. The study included a comparative analysis among some leading channels of the audience perception on sensationalism among these private Urdu news channels.

#### **Social Responsibility Theory:**

“The concept of SR theory discussed in this research the one created by the Hutchins Commission, formally known as the Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947), and included as a theory in Four Theories of the Press (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956) and discussed by other scholars.” (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004). Free and Responsible Press (Commission, 1947) given in the following:

- 1) *“The press should provide a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning.”*

The theory demands truthful information which provides to the public. The information must be with its context as the public can understand the whole event without any chaos and ambiguity.

- 2) *“The press should serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism.”*

According to social responsibility theory media should become a platform for debates and healthy criticism in a neutral way where media organization plays as a facilitator.

3) *"The press should give the projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in society."*

The media should project all the segments of the society. The media should not go out of proportion. Minorities should also project proportionally to promote the equality and media ethics in the society.

4) *"The press should help in the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society."*

The country like Pakistan where literacy rate is less than 40% and the audiences are not much aware of media literacy. The media responsibility to present and clarify the values, beliefs, norms and goals of the society as the audience can deal with according to their social and cultural priorities.

5) *"The press should provide full access to the day's intelligence." (pp. 20–29).*

### **Ethics and the Media:**

"The Social Responsibility Theory claimed that the media could be self-regulating like Media has obligations to fulfill to a democratic society in order to preserve freedom. Media should be self-regulated. Media should have high standards for professionalism and objectivity, as well as truth and accuracy." (Suzanne, 2009)

She further says that "social responsibility does not only fall upon the reporters and producers of media. The responsibility also falls to the consumers to become media literate and maintain high, yet reasonable expectations of the media. In theory, if these things happen, there will be no need for government intervention. It has also set the standards for much of the currently accepted media ethics." (Suzanne, 2009). In fact Self-regulation is an in-house arrangement among media organizations to foster the journalistic rules and principles during their entire business. The awareness, training, regulations and implementations of such arrangements are not a simple process in a country like Pakistan where education systems and cultural environment is not much helpful in character building of a citizen. However, media owners and media teams can

maintain some level in their journalistic activities. Lack of accountability in institutions has grimed the situation more deplorable. The same environment of 'non check & balance' is enjoying by media particularly private news channels.

As stated in this theory, the media should be totally free and independent in its entire business. No doubt, the concept of this theory does not exist in a media illiterate society. Pakistan having low literacy as well as media literacy, the fruits of this theory are not coming for the independence of media as well as for the audience of the society. The Social Responsibility Theory has been successful and useful in a number of developed countries. Although this theory remained under criticism since its inception but it has won a lot of support as well. Democracy and independent media go hand in hand and both are complementary to each other. There have been military governments in Pakistan and the dream of an independent media could not come true. Democracy gives so many options to the growth of independent media. The influx of private news channels during last decade has changed the media landscape in Pakistan. More than 50 news channels and number of print media outlets took birth in a short span of time. Telecommunication and internet facility have been provided to even remote areas of the country. The people are now well informed and good predictors of the events to be happened due to, comparatively, independent media systems in the country. The 'Social Responsibility Theory' is taking root at low pace in Pakistani media and with the passage of time the 'Needle or Magic bullet Theory' will disappear.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 Research Methodology:

A questionnaire was developed to collect data from the sampled population for measuring their perception regarding some communication phenomena. The data was collected from the population living in urban and rural areas of Islamabad. The sample was collected from audiences above the age of 25 years (keeping in view the age of the private news channels in Pakistan) coming from various strata of the society. Those audiences were interviewed who followed news and current affair programs regularly on these private Urdu news channels. So, a method of systematic random sampling was used. The questionnaire was handed over to 350 viewers from different families to record a sample of varied social background. This study investigated the relationship among four independent variables with dependent variable---sensationalism. The research is comprised of four independent variables which were the cause of sensationalism --- the dependent variable. Four variables which were examined:-

- (i) Dramatic subject : Selecting shock value news
- (ii) Repetition of news story : Once, twice, thrice, whole day or whole week
- (iii) Soft news : Celebrity, sports, film, fashion & opinionated news
- (iv) Breaking news : Frequency and nature

#### 4.2 Population:

In order to record the perception of the audiences, the survey was conducted. For the purpose, a questionnaire developed to collect data. The respondents were the residents in the urban (city sectors) and rural (model villages) areas of Islamabad, who had access to cable TV connection and regularly (4 to 8 hours a week) watch news and current affair programs on these private Urdu news channels. The representative population was selected systematically from rural and urban areas of Islamabad who watch these private channels regularly. The selected sectors in urban areas were, E-7/1,

F-6/3, F-7/2, F-10/1, G-8/4, G-10/3, G-11/1, I-9/4 and I-10/2 while in rural areas included Chak Shahzad, Margalla Town, Bara Kahu, Golra Sharif and Noorpur Shahan.

#### **4.3 Sampling Frame:**

The 'general audience' includes the viewers who have cable TV connections, living in urban and rural areas of Islamabad. The researcher got the lists of the viewers of the private channels from the cable providers of their respective areas. Data collected through a single questionnaire in face to face meeting from the target population.

#### **4.4 Sample Size:**

In this study 350 audiences were selected on systematic random sampling by the researcher from urban and rural areas, keeping in view the representation of the audience almost from both urban and rural areas of Islamabad.

#### **4.5 Development of Tool:**

Questionnaire was designed to collect responses. It was constructed according to the principles and specifications outlined by such writers as Erods (1979). To obtain precise answers and to identify trends in the answers, closed ended type questions were constructed.

**The questionnaire contained 19 questions as given below:**

- Question 1 addressed research question No. 1 regarding preference in watching news channel.
- Question 2 addressed research question No. 2 regarding preference in watching of news and current affair segment
- Question 3 addressed research question No. 3 regarding existence of sensationalism in news channels.
- Question 4 addressed research question No. 4 regarding the more sensational channel.

- Questions 5 to 13 addressed different ingredients of sensationalism that are being studied in this research like, dramatic subject, repetition of news, soft news and breaking news etc.
- Question 14 was about the perceived biasness of the channel.
- Question 15 addressed research question No. 8 regarding the perceived credibility of the channel.
- Questions 17 to 19 were concerned about the demographics of the viewers like gender, age and education.

#### **4.6 Collection of Data:**

The data for the study was based on the information, observation, comments of the general audience from the urban (City Sectors) and rural (model villages) areas of Islamabad. For the purpose, a closed ended questionnaire, containing 19 questions, was developed and pre-tested to check the validity of the instrument. The researcher got the observations and views on the five point through nominal and likert orderly measure scales. The time period for collection of data was about 2 weeks from April 10, 2010 to April 22, 2010.

#### **4.7 Instruments:**

To investigate the assumptions there was a method of a close ended questionnaire, for the target audience, was developed and pretested validity of the instrument for this inquiry. The questionnaire was developed on 5 point scale.

#### **4.8 Statistical Analysis:**

The data was analysed and interpreted by using descriptive statistics (central tendency) and inferential statistics (multi regression) to get meaning of the phenomenon with the help of SPSS. And in the light of facts and findings, some recommendations were also made for the news teams of the channels.

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#### **4.9 Administration of the Questionnaire:**

The questionnaire was given by hand to 350 viewers of private news channels at rural and urban areas of Islamabad. The sample was collected from people above the age of 25 years keeping in view the age of the private news channels in Pakistan for maximum exposure purposes. Any 325 questionnaires were received from the viewers. 15 of them did not reply fully to the questionnaires hence they were deleted. However, the total of completed questionnaires comes to 310.

The data collected through questionnaire was analyzed and interpreted with the help of SPSS under multi regression formula. On the basis of main findings and discussions, the conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made and presented in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS**

The data on the 'Exploring Sensationalism in Pakistani Private Urdu News Channels' was collected through a questionnaire, which was specially designed for this study. The sample of the study was selected from general population who has access to the cable TV network and residing in Urban and rural areas of Islamabad. The size of the sample was 350. Questionnaires were distributed equally among the audiences of urban and rural areas of Islamabad for the representative sample. The data was collected through questionnaire in face-to-face meeting. Out of 350 viewers 325 were responded. 15 questionnaires were found incomplete and deleted. The actual questionnaires used for the sample purposes come to 310.

### **Finding-1**

The results indicate that 36% of the respondents watch Geo News while it is followed by Dunya News with a high difference of (21%). 20% of the viewers do watch Express News. ARY News is at the bottom among News channels

### **Finding-2**

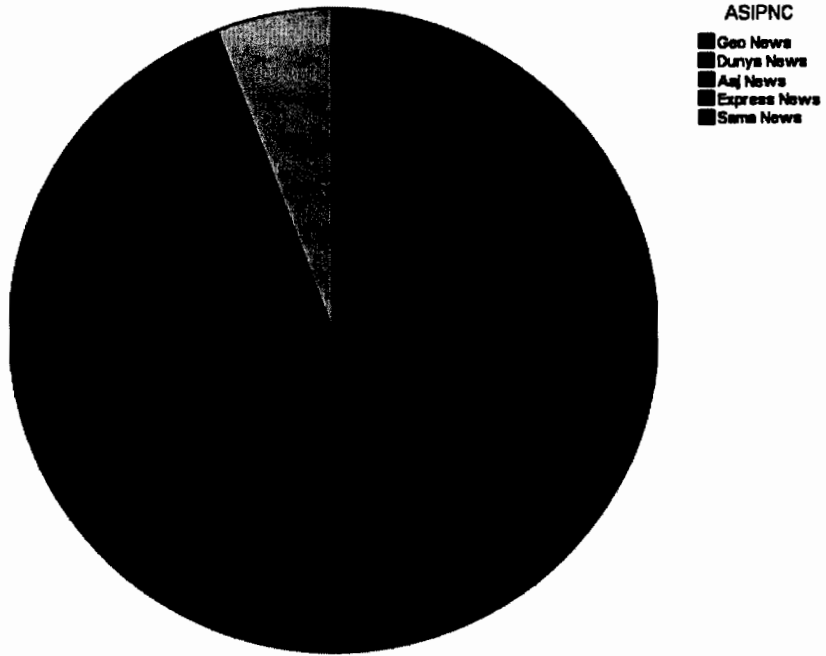
The findings reveal that 51% of the respondents perceive Geo News is the most sensational channel among all the six selected channels. It is clear from the table and graph that positive relationship is existed between frequency of watching channel and perception of sensationalism.

**Table 1**

<b>Most Watched News Channels</b>			<b>Most Sensational News Channel</b>	
<b>Channel</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Geo News	111	35.8	160	51.6
Dunya News	65	21.0	28	9.0
Aaj News	40	12.9	20	6.5
Ary News	12	3.9	00	00
Express News	62	20.0	84	27.1
Sama News	20	6.5	18	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Relationship between frequency of watching channel and perception of sensationalism**

**Graph 1**



**Graph showing most sensational news channel**

### **Finding-3**

Results show that 43% of the audiences observe sensationalism 'Very Greatly' in these news channels while about 32% of the viewers feel sensationalism 'Greatly'. In the opinion of 6% viewers there is no sensationalism. It is clear from the results that majority (75%) of the respondents observe sensationalism.

### **Finding-4**

Results indicate that 46% audiences strongly agree that these news channels present news and current affair programs in a shocking way. 39% of the respondents agree on this query while 7% are disagreeing with the statement. It is clear from the findings that positive relationship is noted between existence of sensationalism and presentation of news in shocking way.

### Finding-5

Results show that 63% of the viewers agreed that these channels prefer to select shock value news stories in their news transmission. Only 13% say 'Not at all' in the query. There is positive relationship between existence of sensationalism and selection of shock value news (dramatic subject).

**Table 2**

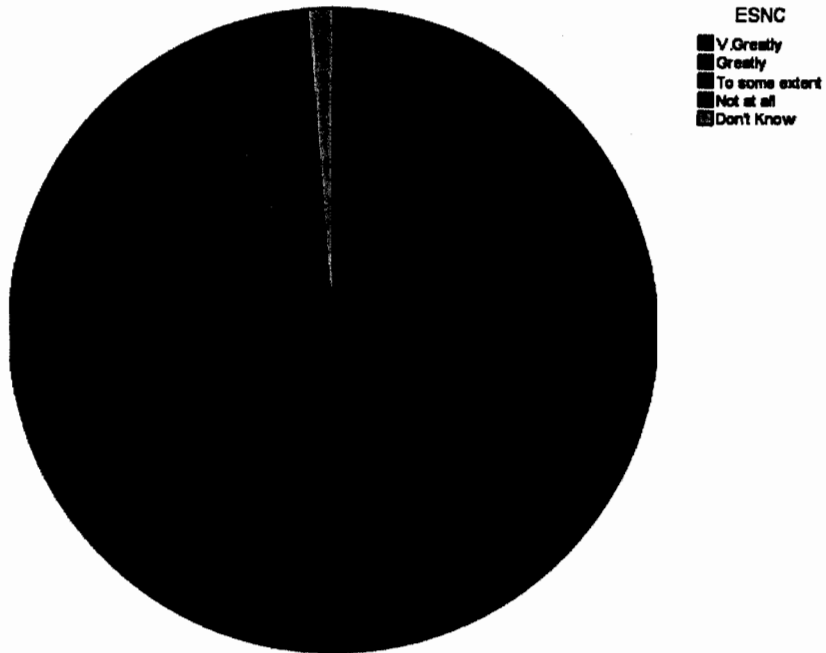
Selection of Shock value news stories			Existence of Sensationalism		
Degree of agreement	Frequency	Percent	Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percent
Very Greatly	106	34	Strongly Agree	142	46
Greatly	89	29	Agree	120	39
To Some Extent	69	22	Not decided	16	5
Not at All	40	13	Strongly Disagree	09	03
Don't Know	06	02	Disagree	20	06
Total	310	100.0	Don't know	03	01
			Total	308	100.0

**Relationship between sensationalism and selection of shock value news**

**Table 3**

Existence of Sensationalism in News Channels			Presentation of News in shocking way by News Channels		
Degree of agreement	Frequency	Percent	Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percent
Very Greatly	135	43.5	Strongly Agree	143	46.1
Greatly	103	33.2	Agree	120	38.7
To Some Extent	50	16.1	Not decided	17	5.5
Not at All	18	5.8	Strongly Disagree	06	1.9
Don't Know	04	1.3	Disagree	23	7.4
Total	310	100.0	Don't know	1	0.3
			Total	310	100.0

**Graph 2**



**Existence of sensationalism and news presentation style**

### **Finding 6**

It is evident from results that 58% viewers considered Geo news as a news breaking channel. And it is followed by Express news with 22% viewers.

### **Finding 7**

Majority (57%) of the audiences agreed that the channels are using 'breaking news' to create hype and excitement among viewers which ultimately contribute towards sensationalism.

**Table 4**

<b>News Breaking Channel</b>			<b>Use of Breaking News to create hype &amp; Excitement</b>		
<b>Channel</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Degree of Agreement</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Geo News	180	58.1	Very Often	85	27.4
Dunya News	33	10.6	Often	92	29.7
Aaj News	20	6.5	Rare	98	31.6
Ary News	06	1.9	Not at All	28	9.0
Express News	67	21.6	Don't Know	7	2.3
Sama News	04	1.3			
Total	310	100		310	100

**Frequency of breaking news and its use in creating hype**



It is clear from the results that 42.6% of the viewers watch political news. Political news followed by entertainment news with high difference of more than half. 36% viewers prefer to watch educational programs. It is noted that those viewers who watch political news and current affair programs have observed more sensationalism. According to the results, it is believed that political programs have more sensational stuff than other segments of news.

**Table 5**

<b>Most Watched News &amp; Current Affair Programs</b>		
<b>Program</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Political	132	42.6
Crime	25	8.1
Economy	34	11.0
Entertainment	60	19.4
Religion	23	7.4
Education	36	11.6
Total	310	100.0

**Table showing most watched news and current affair programs**

## Finding-8

It is clear from results that 80% of the viewers are agreed that tone and gestures of the presenters / anchor persons are sensational. It is evident that tone and gestures of the presenters are contributing towards sensationalism of the news channels. More than 80% of the audience agreed that presentation of news and current affairs is juicy and crispy.

**Table 6**

Tone & Gestures of Presenter			Presentation of News & CA Programs Juicy and Crispy		
Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percent	Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	119	38.4	Strongly Agree	128	41.3
Agree	129	41.6	Agree	128	41.3
Not decided	18	5.8	Not decided	13	5.5
Strongly Disagree	06	1.9	Strongly Disagree	09	2.9
Disagree	34	11.0	Disagree	28	9.0
Don't know	04	1.3	Don't know	04	1.3
Total	310	100.0	Total	310	100.0

### Sensational Style of Anchors in news & Current Affairs programs

### **Finding-9**

The findings show that perception of sensationalism is not discriminated on the basis of perceiver's age.

**Table 7**

<b>Perception of sensationalism</b>			<b>Perceiver's Age and perception of sensationalism</b>			
<b>Degree of Agreement</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Agreement</b>	<b>Disagreement</b>	<b>Total</b>
Very Greatly	135	43.5	25 - 35	91	8	99
Greatly	103	33.2	36 & above	129	10	139
To some extent	50	16.1				
Not at all	18	5.8				
Don't know	04	1.3				
Total	310	100.0		220	18	238

### **Relationship between Perceiver's Age and perception of sensationalism**

## **Finding-10**

Results show that sensationalism does not bear an association with education of the perceiver. Results show that majority (76%) of both the categories do perceive sensationalism in news channels.

**Table 8**

### **Association between Education and Perception of Sensationalism**

<b>Association between Education of the Respondents and Perception of Sensationalism</b>			
<b>Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>Upto Graduation</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>MA / M.Phil / PhD</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>24</b>

### **Finding-11**

Findings show that 38% viewers of the view that channels are used to present ordinary events as breaking news at frequent basis. 33% respondents disagree to the notion. While 35% respondents remained undecided in this query.

**Table 9**

<b>Presentation of Ordinary Events as Breaking News</b>		
<b>Degree of Agreement</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	35	11.3
Agree	85	27.4
Not Decided	107	34.5
Strongly Disagree	73	23.5
Disagree	10	3.2
Total	310	100.0

**Table showing Presentation of Ordinary Events as Breaking News**

### **Finding-12**

36% audiences believe that channels do not cover non issues and concentrate on burning issues. It is followed by 34% audiences saying that these channels are 'rarely' cover non issues. It is clear from results that news channels are focusing on 'issue of the day' in most of their presentations.

**Table 10**

<b>Coverage of Non Issues</b>		
<b>Degree of Agreement</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very often	22	7.1
Often	41	13.2
Rare	104	33.5
Not at all	112	36.1
Don't know	31	10.0
Total	310	100.0

### Findings-13

Results indicate that more than 36% viewers rarely observed repetition of news and current affair programs. The second highest option chosen in this query is 'often'. Overall there is a consensus of the viewers that news channels are rarely repeating news and current affair programs.

**Table 11**

<b>Repetition of news programs without update</b>		
<b>Degree of Agreement</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Often	13	4.2
Often	86	27.7
Rare	113	36.5
Not at all	49	15.8
Don't Know	49	15.8
Total	310	100.0

### **Finding-14**

Results indicate that 56% of the respondents observe biasness in Geo news in terms of tone, language and presentations. The second most biased channel is Express news with a high difference of 25%. It is indicated in the results that all other four under studied channels are considered as less biased except Geo and Express news.

### **Finding-15**

Results show that 51% of the viewers say that Geo news is presenting sensational stuff. The second more sensational channel is Express news according to the 27% viewers. The results show that negative relationship exists between sensationalism and biasness.

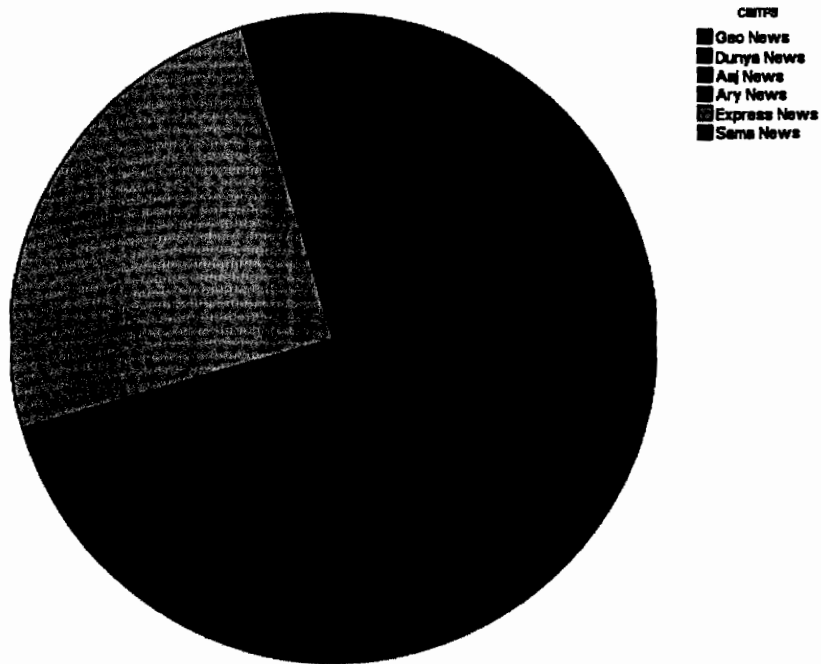
**Table 12**

<b>Channel's Biasness</b>		<b>Existence of Sensationalism</b>		
<b>Channel</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Geo News	175	56.5	160	51.6
Dunya News	18	5.8	28	9.0
Aaj News	12	3.9	20	6.5
Ary News	14	4.5	00	00
Express News	77	24.8	84	27.1
Sama News	14	4.5	18	5.8
Total	310	100.0	310	100

**Relationship between channel's biasness and perception of Sensationalism**



**Graph 3**



**Biasness in Tone, Language & Presentation Style of News**

## Finding-16

Findings show that there is no relationship between frequency of watching channel and perceived credibility of the channel. As indicated in the results, Geo news is the most watched channel while audiences rated Geo news as the second most credible channel after Dunya news.

**Table 13**

Most Credible News Channel			Most Watched News Channel		
Channel	Frequency	Percent	Channel	Frequency	Percent
Geo News	71	22.9	Geo News	111	35.8
Dunya News	96	31.0	Dunya News	65	21.0
Aaj News	43	14.87	Aaj News	40	12.9
Ary News	15	4.83	Ary News	12	3.9
Express News	57	18.4	Express News	62	20.0
Sama News	20	6.5	Sama News	20	6.5

**Relationship between most watched and most credible news channel**

# CHAPTER 6

## DISCUSSION

In the light of findings, the inclusion of all four tested variables like dramatic subject, soft news, repetition and breaking news appear to have substantial role in making the news and current affair programs sensational on the understudied news channels. Study shows that audiences perceive sensationalism frequently on these news channels. More than 76% of the respondents observed sensationalism on these news channels as shown in Finding-3, Table-2. The presence of these variables in news features and news presentations is significant.

It has been drawn from the results that the dramatic subject has an observable impact in motivating the factors of watching an item as the second most watched news segment is entertainment news. The channels have the tendency to cover soft issues very frequently like sports, celebrity, entertainment, crime, social and cultural issues. Table-1 shows that Geo has greater viewership and is rated as the most sensational channel as well. Positive relationship exists between amount of watching channel and existence of sensationalism.

Findings-4, Table-2 shows that these channels present news information in a shocking way to create hype and excitement. In the process of making the news excited and juicy, the anchor or presenter delivers the information by staying away from the accuracy and objectivity. As indicated in Table-4 regarding the query of 'preference in watching segment of news and current affair programs, the second most watched segment of news is entertainment after politics; it may or may not be the cause of heavy viewership. This includes the viewers of entertainment programs who prefer to watch Geo as it has diversity in entertainment programs.

It is revealed from the results as shown in Table-3, Finding-6, that Geo news is considered as a 'news breaking channel' followed by Express news. Interestingly, both these news channels are at top in the race of sensationalism. It is clear that frequency of

breaking news is contributing towards sensationalism. Audiences might give preference to these channels due to breaking news practice. Positive association has been noted between perception of sensationalism and frequency of breaking news.

Most of the electronic media outlets are property of the people having purely a capitalistic mind and they have only one purpose that how to make money. They have hired media people and have been using them for their own interests. Therefore, the focus is on financial gains and not to inform and educate the people in developing democracy. The commercial growth is rapid while maturity and professional growth is very slow. The news and current affair programs are mainly sponsored by advertisements, and they have their vested interests in media outlets. The vested interests of the stakeholders, sometimes, can be prioritized over national interests.

We have witnessed of some significant events happened in recent years in Pakistan after the inception of private news channels like, War on terror, Earthquake 2005, Red mosque issue 2007, judiciary crises 2007, Media crises 2007, Elections 2008, NRO 2009 and flood 2010. The only common thing in all these events has been the element of 'sensational features' in shape of different camera shots, tone, language and live commentary. Sometimes, viewers have to explore the truth from truth less information which is caused chaotic situation and the issues remain abstract which leads to unrest and sensationalism. It is ultimately have some negative effects relating to the credibility of the channel. It is clear from the outcome of the study shown in Table-1 that sensational approach of the channel does hurt the credibility. In contrast to this, the less sensational channel Dunya news is more credible as shown in Table-12.

According to the Findings-15, Table-12 no relationship has been observed between amount of watching channel and perceived credibility of the channel. Timely news and frequency of breaking news may be the reason for having greater viewership. It is assumed that the increase of sensationalism in news on these channels is relevant to media organizations due to the challenge of double task to keep grabbing and maintaining the viewers in the race of commercialization.

It is clear from the Findings-15 that moderate level of sensationalism is desirable to intact the viewers. This technique is being used by Dunya news. The

element of sensation in their news is low having some upward trend. The spectators like to watch moderate level of sensationalism in the news as indicated in results. It is also observed that biasness of the channel does amount to sensationalism as indicated in the Table-11. The results show that Geo with greater viewership is more biased news channel. One reason for having the greater viewership might be the pioneer in the field of private news channel in Pakistan and it is human psychology to intact with the older and resists the newer one. The other reason might be the diversity in entertaining stuff that grabs the audience.

Majority of the channels eager to present soft news as main part in their whole day transmission as shown in Table-4, Findings-7. 29% viewers watch soft news. The major portion of such stuff is downloaded rather than self efforts of their media men by going into the investigative journalism. These channels have the tendency 'not to go for investigative journalism' because it is time consuming and expensive. In all this process the viewers remain in ambiguity, chaos and less informed about the issue and their thrust of information is not fulfilled. Resultantly, zapping begins their search of comparatively a more suitable or less sensational channel.

It is evident that tone and gestures of the presenters are contributing towards sensationalism of the news channels. More than 80% of the audience agreed that presentation of news and current affairs programs is juicy and crispy as shown in Table 5. Almost all the channels put soft news in the main body of every bulletin regardless of their importance and utility. The channels do prefer to give news of celebrities, Bollywood, sports stars, models, and Hollywood rather going for straightforward local social issues of greater importance. The news of fashion shows are regularly seen on these channels with commentary.

Repetition of news items on the channels is a routine matter and they have the tendency of repeating the news and current affair programs and allied footages even for days. There is a mix response regarding the query of repetition of news as shown in Table-10, Findings-12. But majority of the viewers are of the view that the channels repeat the stories frequently. It is also cleared from the query in Table-9 that news channels do focus on issue of the day in most of their presentation and they rarely cover non issues.

Table-8 shows unanimity on the issue that these channels present routine and normal news as breaking news without any characteristics of breaking news. This practice creates hype and undue importance about the news event. The only purpose of the channel from such practice is to gather the maximum audience and to attract the viewers. By doing this, in the long run, the channel does lose the credibility and viewers. Findings-8, Table-6 show that age of the viewer has no connection with perception of sensationalism. The balanced opinion in the query is celebrated from young as well as from old viewers.

## CONCLUSION

Among all the channels chosen for the study, Geo News is perceived by a large number of viewers as a highly sensational channel. The study also revealed that Geo has a greater viewer ship and is considered most sensational channel at the same time. These channels mainly focus on excitement and drama in news programs and they do not give much time to investigative and informative journalism which is necessary to enhance the credibility of the channel. The emotionality and personal attachment of the reporter/anchor person was also the prominent feature in all these presentations. A reasonable portion of every news bulletins is comprised of soft news on these private news channels. The practice of breaking news is being used to create hype and excitement to catch the maximum audiences. Geo News is considered news breaking channel.

It is concluded from the results of the study that Geo is most watched news channel and the most sensationalists at the same time. It has shown in the study that there is positive relationship between amount of watching news channel and existence of sensationalism. It is also concluded that sensationalism bears positive relationship with credibility of the channel as both Geo and Express news considered to be the most sensational and less credible channels at the same time. Express News is the second most biased and sensational news channel after Geo News. It is also concluded that Dunya News is the most credible channel among all understudied channels. It is concluded from the findings of the study that moderate level of sensationalism is desirable and complementary to enhance the credibility of the channel. This technique is being used by Dunya news.

## SUGGESTIONS

Critics of the media criticize the non professional approach of the media organizations. They argued that the rapid growth in media especially in electronic media has adverse effects on media institutionalization. In their views, these channels creating culture of sensationalism which takes away the news and current affair programs from accuracy, credibility and objectivity. This practice of the channels is creating a heating debate among psychologists regarding negative effects of sensational stuff. The negative impacts on our society are rather damaging. In the following few lines some suggestions are made to improve the news and current affairs programs:-

The media should consider the viewer as a key stake holder in the process of making and disseminating the information. They should well rehearse about the requirements and the utility of the information present for audiences. These channels should keep the accuracy and objectivity on top while giving any information. The journalistic norms and principles should be kept in mind to avoid any social and cultural conflict. The channels should avoid unnecessary hype and fear because it has observed from the results that undue hype and chaos lead to sensationalism.

The ordinary and routine events should not be converted into breaking news without characteristics of the breaking news. The anchor must not be partial and emotionally attached to any news story. By doing this, the biasness can be minimized and credibility can be enhanced. A balance between commercialization and professionalism should be maintained while reporting, processing and delivering any information to the audience. To educate media illiterate society, it is recommended to take initiative by taking hype less and positive direction in these transmissions. These news channels should understand their responsibilities in bringing the actual issues. They must not waste the energies and time of the audiences. They must be covered only socially significant events. Media trained people should be hired to improve the situation. The media owners must think about the national image and interests and they should try to save vested interests of the country. These channels should give more coverage to the issues



relating to education, economy and health. The media people must well informed about freedom and limitations in their entire business to avoid any unpleasant situation.

There must be a code of ethics for these news channels. Media people should understand that they are answerable. Non issues should be avoided and the precious time should be devoted for actual issues. The topics in talk shows should be covered which socially and culturally important. Although the age of private TV channels in Pakistan is less than ten years but it is enough to take root. Whenever businessmen cum media people want them to be hijacked and try to run media system according to their wishes.

These channels focus on excitement and drama in news programs and they do not give much importance to investigative and informative aspect which is required for newsworthy. The emotionality and personal attachment of the reporter/anchor was also the prominent feature in all these presentations. The reporter must not try to add material to the event because it is hurting to credibility of the channel and the reporter as well. The channels should not try to make chaos and suspense in news. Media watchdogs can play important role to promote media ethics and lessen the media propaganda. These channels should avoid giving out of proportion coverage to an event e.g. the marriage of Tennis star Sania Mirza and Cricketer Shoaib Malik. Credibility can be improved by taking diversified opinion from resource persons on the issues in their news and current affair programs.

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## QUESTIONNAIRE

NOTE: THIS QUESTIONNAIR INVOLVES PAKISTANI PRIVATE URDU NEWS CHANNELS ONLY. PLEASE GIVE ANSWERS TO ALL THE QUESTIONS. CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE CHOICE

S#	STATEMENT	REPLY
1	Which of the following private news channels do you usually watch for getting news?	1. Geo news      2. Dunya news 3. Aaj news      4. Ary news 5. Express news      6. Sama news
2	Which segment of news and current affair program do you watch frequently?	1. Political      2. Crime      3. Economic 4. Entertainment      5. Religious 6. Education
3	How greatly these news channels are sensationalizing news events?	1. V. Greatly      2. Greatly 3. To some extent 4. Not at all      5. Don't know
4	Which of the following news channel is presenting more sensational information?	1. Geo news      2. Dunya new 3 Aaj news      4. Ary news 5. Express news      6. Sama news
5	Do you agree that these channels present news stories in a shocking way to generate interest and excitement?	1. S. Agree      2. Agree      3. Not Decided 4. S. Disagree      5. Disagree 6. Don't know
6	How do you agree these channels prefer to choose shock value news like violence, crime, terrorism, conflicts, deaths, earthquakes, loss of property?	1. S. Agree      2. Agree      3. Not Decided 4. S. Disagree      5. Disagree      6. Don't know
7	Do you agree that tone and gestures of the presenters of these news programs are sensational	1. S. Agree      2. Agree 3. Not Decided      4. S. Disagree 5. Disagree      6. Don't know
8	How often non issues get more time slot in these channels?	1. V. Often      2. Often      3. Rare 4. Not at all      5. Don't know
9	Do you agree that these channels present news stories in a juicy & crispy manner?	1. S. Agree      2. Agree      3. Not Decided 4. S. Disagree      5. Disagree 6. Don't know

10	Do you agree that these channels show visual clipping with multi camera angle to create hype?	1. S. Agree 2. Agree 3. Not Decided 4. S. Disagree 5. Disagree 6. Don't know
11	Which of the following channels do you think is considered as a news breaking channel?	1. Geo news 2. Dunya news 3. Aaj news 4. Ary news 5. Express news 6. Sama news
12	How often these channels are using breaking news as a tool to create hype to hold maximum viewers?	1. V.Often 2. Often 3. Rare 4. Not at all 5. Don't know
13	Do you agree that these channels give routine news events in shape of breaking news?	1. S. Agree 2. Agree 3. Not Decided 4. S. Disagree 5. Disagree 6. Don't know
14	How often news & current affair programs on these channels are repeated even for hours?	1. V. Often 2. Often 3. Rare 4. Not at all 5. Don't know
15	Which of the following channels is biased in language, tone and presentation style in news & current affair programs?	1. Geo news 2. Dunya news 3. Aaj news 4. Ary news 5. Express news 6. Sama news
16	In your opinion, which of the following news channels is more credible?	1. Geo news 2. Dunya news 3. Aaj news 4. Ary news 5. Express news 6. Sama news
17	Gender	1. Male 2. Female
18	Age	1. 25- 35 2. 36 & Above
19	Education	1. Upto Graduation 2. MA/ MPhil / PhD

