
Faizullah Jan, Ph.D *

Jihadi Publications in Pakistan and Public Perception of Religious Minorities

This paper investigates the role of jihadi publications of Pakistan in creating a negative perception of religious minorities in the country. Drawing on framing and discourse analysis as theories of mass media effects this paper examines how jihadi publications, through the use of language and particular frames, affect tolerance and trust of their readers when they form opinion about religious minorities. The empirical data collected through a survey of 50 respondents in Peshawar city of Pakistan demonstrates that people who read extremist or mainstream media have almost the same level of tolerance and trust for religious minorities. However, there is a trend, though small, of extremist media readers showing comparatively less tolerance towards minorities than those who read the mainstream media. Findings of this research indicate that jihadi publications play a role in shaping public opinion about minorities.

* Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

Keywords: *Jihadi media; framing; discourse analysis; Pakistan; religious minorities*

■ Introduction

What role the mass media play in shaping public perception of minorities in a country, especially when there is widespread persecution of people who believe in religion(s) other than that of the majority? This article reports original research findings about the role of extremist media in creating a negative perception of religious minorities in Pakistan.

The proliferation of extremist media in Pakistan has recently received attention from a number of researchers (Khan, 2004; Rana, 2008; IMS, 2009; PIPS, 2010). All of these researches have been conducted post 9/11 when Pakistan, Afghanistan and extremism became hot topics for the international media. The extremist media of Pakistan has not yet been framed into any of the different types of media systems that have been documented since Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963) developed four normative theories of the press in early 1950s.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) updated Siebert et al.'s (1963) study by developing three models of the press, which, according to their research, exist in countries other than Asia and Africa. However, extremist or *jihadi*¹ media of Pakistan share many characteristics with one of their models, *Polarized Pluralism Model*. Like *Pluralized Pluralism Model*, *jihadi* publications are against the system and work within

¹In this paper, *extremist* and *jihadi* media or publications are those newspapers/magazines which are published by militant/sectarian organizations.

the ambit of their conservative ideology. For these publications, in line with Hallin and Mancini (2004) model, the notion of politically neutral journalism is less plausible when a wide range of competing worldviews contend.

■ Purpose and Significance

The way media deal with minorities does affect public perception and security of those who are negatively portrayed. Religious extremism is posing a threat to countries like Pakistan, and to the peace of the world. Extremism cannot be countered without understanding extremist forces. To understand them we need to understand their mind, which can be done by analyzing their publications (Rahman, 2010). One way to analyze these publications is to know any possible correlation between their readership and negative opinion of religious minorities. The growing prevalence and easy availability of extremist publications suggest that they play an important role in creating a negative public perception of minorities.

A number of researchers have examined how media are used for promoting Islamic extremism (Prentice et al. 2010), but few have studied the print publications' role in creating hatred against religious minorities in Pakistan. Only two studies have been so far conducted on extremist media in Pakistan. Khan (2004) conducted a qualitative research attempting to understand the phenomenon of online extremism in Pakistan, in the context of political Islam, and its attendant mechanism. He found out that extremist websites propagated an extremist view of life and that their contents tried to sharpen a *jihadi* identity (p.449).

Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) has listed four broad categories of extremist publications in Pakistan: 1) Publications by *jihadi* outfits, 2) by sectarian groups, 3) by *madrassas* (religious seminaries), and 4) vernacular publications (PIPS, 2010). [This article discusses only publications by *jihadi* outfits.]

These studies discuss the emergence of extremist media in Pakistan, but they provide limited understanding of the ways in which these publications create a negative public perception of religious minorities. This research is going to fill that gap. The aim of this study is modest: thinking about religious minorities, what is the tolerance and trust level of those who read these publications as compared to those who read the mainstream press.

In the following pages, this article presents a brief outline of the media system in Pakistan, with a focus on the emergence of *jihadi* publications. It is followed by a description of methods that have been used for conducting a field survey, sampling, measurement scales, findings and discussion on the outcome of the survey.

■ Literature Review

Media system in Pakistan has recently become more diverse with the emergence of private television channels after media regulation laws were relaxed in 2002. Private televisions and FM radio stations have almost ended monopoly of the state-run electronic media. There are more than 1500 daily, weekly or monthly newspapers published in English, Urdu, Pashto and other languages. The English-language press has a broad liberal tradition, while newspapers published in other languages are more

conservative in their religious and political outlook (Dickinson & Memon, 2011). Despite becoming high-tech and increasing in numbers, media system in Pakistan is still governed by the cultural ethos of 'parasitic landlordism' that has grown out of land possession and land ownership (Akhtar, 2000).

A new press emerged in Pakistan in 1980s in order to support the call for *jihad* (holy war) in Afghanistan and building support for Islamist movements; this has now become a media industry (IMS, 2009). It saw a mushrooming growth after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. when NATO forces entered Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban government in Kabul. Some commentators call it *jihadi* papers (Rana, 2008), others consider them an *alternative* press (Khan, 2004)

Without studying the *jihadi* media and their growing influence, the picture of media landscape in Pakistan is incomplete. The discourse that is used by *jihadi* publications is not a new phenomenon, though it became widespread when militant organizations launched their own publications. According to a survey report, as of 2009, six major *jihadi* outfits print more than 50 newspapers and magazines, which glorify militants and disparage the U.S., its allies, and religious minorities in Pakistan (IMS, 2009). They also glorify the cult of death in the name of martyrdom (Khan, 2004).

Few researchers have studied these *jihadi* publications and their impact on public opinion, especially public perception of people who believe, unlike their publishers and readers, in religions other than mainstream *Sunni* Islam. Little attention has been paid to the contents of extremist publications; far less to the discourse that these newspapers use in their news and articles when reporting or commenting on issues related to religious minorities in Pakistan. Not only

what they report on, but also the *way* they report events and issues make them distinct from the mainstream press. It is believed that their diction and style have a bearing on the public perception of religious minorities (Rana, 2008).

It is argued that the discourse of these publications results in a negative public opinion and intolerance towards minorities. Not only in Pakistan, in some other countries to a negative image of religious minorities is produced and reproduced in discourse and communication (Van Dijk, 1993). Therefore public opinion or perception cannot be explained without including news media discourses on minorities in an overall analysis of discursive practices of knowledge production and diffusion of images by societal organizations and powerful institutions (Hussain, 2000).

Hartley (1995) says that the news itself is a social institution and a cultural discourse which exists and has meaning only in relation to other institutions and discourse operating at the same time (p. 345).

H 1. I hypothesize that *jihadi* publications in Pakistan play a basic role in the production of a negative public perception of religious minorities in the country.

H 2. I also hypothesize that when people read these *jihadi* publications they become less tolerant and less trustful of religious minorities.

It has been observed that the mass media do not determine attitude, but through their discourse "they do structure and select information we may use on which to base decisions about what attitude is appropriate" (Verma, 1992, p. 312). A discourse that thrives on religious doctrine becomes more effective in shaping attitude of the audience. As Talbani (2010) says, "Political power lies in the control over religious

interpretation and the discourse that the religious group uses to exert control" (p.54).

Hussain's (2000) theoretical framework for his research on *Islam, Media and Minorities in Denmark* guides my study of *jihadi* publications and public perception of religious minorities in Pakistan. Hussain argues that mass media have an enormous, but indirect, influence on public perception of minorities. He argues that "in a domain of information in which audiences have little access to alternative sources of knowledge, or otherwise are unable to have an experiential knowledge on the subject in question, the cognitive frames of interpretation and understanding in that area of knowledge and information are provided for the most part by media discourses" (p. 100).

The researcher argues that *jihadi* publications are the major source of information for their typical readers who are less likely to use a media that carry an opposing view. Stroud (2007) argues that people with conservative views are less likely to expose themselves to a media that offers an opposing or alternative opinion.

This literature review shows that the mass media have a significant impact, but indirect especially when people have either no access to, or, in a bid to avoid opposing view, avoid alternative sources of information. This research attempts to see whether by reading extremist media people develop a negative perception of religious minorities by showing less tolerance toward them and a lack of trust in them.

■ Methods

The researcher distributed through field researchers a self-completion questionnaire to 50 respondents in Peshawar city

of Pakistan: 25 of them comprised experimental group and 25, control group. The experimental group was given an article entitled "The Status of Religious Minorities in an Islamic State," which had been published in weekly *Ghazva*, one of over 100 *jihadi* publications in Pakistan (Rana, 2008). The article, which was administered to the experimental group, was purposely selected for its inflammatory language against religious minorities by calling them "not equal citizens of Pakistan" and "liable to pay *jizya* [a special tax]" for living in the Islamic state.

The control group was given an article on almost the same issue (religious minorities) from the mainstream newspaper, *Dawn*, which is considered to be unbiased towards any religious or ethnic group or groups. Both the articles were in *Urdu*, a language commonly understood in Pakistan. Almost all *jihadi* newspapers are published in *Urdu*. After the respondents read their respective articles, both the control group and the experiment group were given a questionnaire to know their opinion about religious minorities in Pakistan.

■ Sampling

Sampling for this study was non-probability (convenient sampling). It was purposive, opportunistic and snowball or chain-referral. The researcher selected those who were 18-30 years of age and who have enough education to read and understand text in *Urdu*. The sampling was also opportunistic because the researcher chose some of the respondents knowing, through chain-referral, that they regularly read *jihadi* newspapers and some others who the researcher knew read the mainstream newspapers. The researcher chose this

sampling because random sampling could result in having all the respondents who read *jihadi* newspapers or those who never read these publications.

For the sake of convenience and for a variety of other reasons the researcher chose only male respondents. There is a general impression that in the present circumstances extremism exists only among male members of society because they have more opportunities, as compared to female, to express their religious emotions by protesting in the streets or taking part in violence.

To make sure that only people who are not less than 18 years of age take the survey, those who had a valid National Identity Card (NIC) were sampled for the experiment. [People below 18 are not eligible for NIC.] Field researchers administered the survey and they were on hand to ensure that queries over questions are answered and completed questionnaires could be collected.

As many as 60% of the respondents were between 27 and 30 years of age, while the age of the rest of 40% ranged between 18 and 26 years. 18% (9) have completed either school or college education, whereas 26% (13) have bachelor's degree and 38% (19) have master's degree. 14% (7) of respondents have monthly income less than Rs. 5,000, which means they live below the poverty line. [In Pakistan, minimum wage is 5,000 rupees but it has never been implemented.] 38% (19) of respondents have monthly income between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 15,000, while 22% (11) have between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 25,000.

The experiment was conducted in some cases individually, in others with groups of three or four respondents, depending on their availability, and at a place of their convenience. In some cases the respondents were

contacted at their residence, knowing about the choice of their newspaper reading from their friends or acquaintances.

■ Measures (Tolerance)

Key dependent variables included *tolerance*, with a mean of 2.81 and a standard deviation of 1.27, to know how tolerant respondents are towards religious minorities. I developed this scale by grouping together questions like *do they consider religious minorities to be equal citizens of Pakistan? Do religious minorities have rights to practice their religion and have public jobs?* Reliability test of *tolerance* scale gave a Cronbach's Alpha value of .870, which shows a strong association among the questions.

■ Trust

Trust was another dependent variable, with a mean of 2.38 and standard deviation of .97, which was developed to measure how much respondents *trust* religious minorities as citizens of Pakistan. This scale was developed by grouping together questionnaire items like *do you trust religious minorities as loyal citizens of Pakistan? And that they are not conspiring against the country? Minorities have equal rights to job; Minorities can run for a public office etc.* The respondents were asked to choose among response option of (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) neutral, (d) disagree, and (e) strongly disagree.

The researcher ran *reliability analysis* for this new variable, which gave a *Cronbach's Alpha value* of .635, which shows that though not very strong, but there is an association between the items grouped together.

■ Findings

The researcher ran *t-test* to know whether there is any statistically significant difference between the control and experiment groups after they read the stimuli and took the survey. On the *tolerance* level there were no differences between the control and experiment group, with $t(47) = .14$, $p = \textit{not significant}$, which shows that those who consume extremist media have the same tolerance level as of those who consume mainstream media. As table 1 shows, t-test of the two groups gives almost the same *mean* and t-values.

Table-1: Experimental Condition

		N	Mean (SD)	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Tolerance	Control Group	24	3.2639(1.17843)	-.149	47	.882
	Treatment Group	24	3.3067(.80892)			
Trust	Control Group	24	2.2444(1.18521)	-.956	48	.344
	Treatment Group	24	2.5076(.70069)			

On the level of *trust* the results show that those who consume extremist media have slightly more trust of the religious minorities as compared to those who read the mainstream media, which is surprising. However, it is likely that some of the respondents may have marked some items on the questionnaire without understanding them.

$t(48) = .95$, $p = \textit{not significant}$

Dependent Variables: trust, tolerance

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Trust	2.81	1.273	50

Tolerance	2.37	.9727	50
-----------	------	-------	----

Respondents, both those who consume mainstream media or extremist media, showed more tolerance ($M=2.81$, $SD=1.273$) than trust ($M=2.37$, $SD=.9727$) in religious minorities in Pakistan. However, the difference is not statistically significant.

■ Discussion

The data presented here provide some insight into influence of the *jihadi* media on public perception of religious minorities in Pakistan. Mass media effect is a long-term process, and it is always indirect. Therefore, to measure the impact of *jihadi* publications only a long-term study in the light of Gerbner's (1990) *Cultivation Theory* can give an accurate picture. However, the picture that emerges from this research shows that readers, irrespective of whether they read a mainstream or an extremist newspaper, do not have a negative perception of religious minorities. This means that the contents of the extremist media have almost no impact on opinion formation of the people towards religious minorities, which dispels a common perception that publications run by extremist organizations create hatred against people who believe in religion other than mainstream *Sunni* Islam.

The general assumption underlying the study was that as the news media are the major source of day-to-day knowledge and information for the majority population. They play an important role in the formation of opinion on religious minorities in Pakistan. Therefore it was assumed that extremist media was responsible for stoking violence against religious minorities by creating a negative public

perception of them. However, it does not mean that extremist media do not play any role in demonizing 'others'.

A similar research conducted in Denmark (Hussain, 2000) shows that due to lack of personal experience with minorities, the themes and topics that become the center of public awareness on minorities are retrieved from the discourse of the mass media. Does it mean that the extremist media in Pakistan do not provide a predefinition of minority problems with which people build their own attitudes?

Answer to this question is NO, but may be the minority-majority population distribution is different in Pakistan than in Denmark. This research gives a different result and it is likely that since common people regularly interact with religious minorities—by living in the same neighborhood, going to the same school, and in most cases being members of the same political parties—they do not draw inferences from the discourse of news in the extremist media. Because lacking the interpersonal experience with religious minority members, media audience usually have no other frame of reference at hand than the memory scripts from news media discourse.

There are many limitations of this research in terms of validity because of which its results cannot be generalized. The first major issue is with the sample size: results obtained from a questionnaire distributed to only 50 people cannot be generalized to the 180 million population of Pakistan. Second, respondents were given just one article for reading before they took the survey, which itself limits the scope of the study.

Respondents were asked to read an article and then complete a questionnaire all in the presence of field researcher. This could also influence opinion of respondents

by trying to not look prejudiced or narrow-minded. However, this research can be taken as a pre-testing for a larger research in future. This research however does show a trend, though negligible, that contents of *jihadi* media influence perception of religious minorities in Pakistan.

■ References

- Akhtar, R.S. (2000). *Media, Religion, and Politics in Pakistan*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dickenson, R. and Memon, B. (2011). Press Clubs, the Journalistic Field and the Practices of Journalism in Pakistan. *Journalism Studies*. 1–17.
- Gerbner, G. (1990). *Advancing on the path of righteousness (maybe)*. In N. Signorielli & M. Morgan (Eds.), *Cultivation Analysis: New directions in media effects research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hallin, D.C., and Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hartley, J. (1995). *Understanding News*. London: Routledge.
- Hussain, M. (2000). Islam, Media and Minorities in Denmark. *Current Sociology*. 48(4), 95–116.
- International Media Support. (July 2009). *Between Radicalization and Democratization in an Unfolding Conflict: Media in Pakistan*. Denmark.
- Khan, Z. (2004). "Cyber Jihad: Fighting the Infidels from Pakistan" In S. Gan, J. Gomez & U. Johannsen, (eds.), *Asian Cyberactivism: Freedom of Expression and Media Censorship*. Bangkok: Friedrich Naumann Foundation. 442–470.
- Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (2010). *Understanding the Militants' Media in Pakistan: Outreach and Impact*: Islamabad.

- Prentice, S. et al. (2010). Analyzing the semantic content and persuasive composition of extremist media: A case study of texts produced during the Gaza conflict. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 13(1), 61–73.
- Rana, M. A. (2008). Jihadi Print Media in Pakistan: An Overview. *Conflict and Peace Studies*, Islamabad: Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies.1 (1).
- Siebert, F., Peterson, T. and Schramm, W. (1963). *Four Theories of the Press*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Stroud, N. J. (2007). Media Use and Political Predispositions: Revisiting the Concept of Selective Exposure. *Political Behavior*. 30(3), 341–366.
- Talbani, A (2010). "Pedagogy, Power, and Discourse: Transformation of Islamic Education" In Stephen Lyon & Iain Edgar (eds.), *Shaping a Nation: An Examination of Education in Pakistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press. pp. 54–72.
- Tariq Rahman (2010) "The Education System in Pakistan with Respect to Inequality." In Stephen Lyon and Iain Edgar (eds.), *Shaping a Nation: An Examination of Education in Pakistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press. pp. 231–261
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (eds.) (2001), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*. London: Sage Publications: 301–317.
- Verma, G. (1992). "Attitude, Race Relations and Television," in J. Twichin (ed.) *The Black and White Media Show Book—Handbook for the Study of Racism and Television*, Trentham Books. pp. 123–129.