

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

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Volume 7 | Issue 1

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2024

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# Impact of Media on Public Perception and Peacebuilding

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## ABSTRACT

*This article discusses the effect of the media reports on the perception of the common people and the way it influences the peacebuilding process. The study evaluates the way media shapes the perspective of the audience and precisely highlights the connection between media and narratives. Furthermore, the article also analyses the usage of media for fostering peace while outlining the challenges preventing peace journalism from proactively facilitating peacebuilding efforts.*

**Keywords:** *media, peacebuilding, media bias, conflict reporting, peace journalism, peacekeeping approaches, social media, media and conflict, war reporting.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Media reports have become an essential means of procuring as well as disseminating information in the modern social landscape. Technological advancements have been expanding the scope of media. However, the observations indicate that media reports have been demonstrating robust potential to actualise peacebuilding efforts.

The media reports facilitate the projection of real-time information across distinct parts of the world. Media is a crucial tool to manifest the democratic political environment. The primary objective of media is to provide the stakeholders with precisely accurate news and information. However, in the process of furnishing the audience with information, the reports generated by the media platforms and channels also shape the perceptions of the public towards the specific event or trend. According to the statement Gene Zucker, (1978), the obtrusiveness of news as well as short timed prominence of such information in the media plays a central role in stimulating the influence of such news on public perception. Gene Zucker, (1978), has established this argument by projecting the theory of variable news media influence.

## II. MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PERCEPTION OF THE PEOPLE

In the globalised world, access to unbiased and accurate information is limited. This occurs because civilians acquire information only on the topics as well as events on which the news

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channels and media platforms disseminate reports. This indicates the fact that the information that civilians procure about global events is filtered and edited information. This phenomenon occurs due to the agenda-setting nature of the news channels and media platforms. The repetition of the news concerning a precise event or incident accompanied by the projection of similar information from other news sources plays a central role in influencing the perception of the audience and making them believe that the news or event is indeed 'significant'. The resonance of similar information from diverse media sources is the outcome of the prevailing imitation as well as influence in the journalism landscape. The homogeneity in the narrative concerning the headlines or breaking news is caused by the journalism practices (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2014).

### **III. MEDIA AND NARRATIVES**

Modern democracies consider freedom of speech and expression as the pillars of a democratic and progressive socio-political environment. However, the lack of rigorous regulations concerning the dissemination of unbiased news and information through the media often increases the risk of setting narratives. In the case of conflicts, the framing of narratives plays a significant role in influencing public opinion that has the potential to change the course of the conflict. The current news procurement process often acts as a 'feedback loop' (Lynch, 2001, as cited in Lee, Maslog & Kim, 2006). This is because the events, especially the conflicts attract the media that collects the information to be published or broadcast. However, the news that is projected in front of the audience is edited and simplified information with embedded narratives to convey the message to common people in a comprehensible manner. Such strategies are used to increase the ratings while stimulating the circulation of such news. As opined by Lee, Maslog & Kim, (2006), media coverage of conflict or the reports on war is based on the consideration that conflict acts as a dominant news value.

Media have often been accused of framing narratives and taking sides in the modern geopolitical landscape. However, the ongoing conflicts in distinct parts of the world are reported by the media based on their understanding of the situation. The limited information about the background of the concerned conflicts accompanied by the superficial awareness of the contrasting ideologies increases the risk of generating biased news. Such news often nullifies or validates events or actions based on limited information concerning the ground reality that inevitably leads to the formulation of narratives. For example, the narrative of the media reports concerning the ongoing Israel-Palestine war is determined by the timeline of such hostilities selected by the reporter (news.stanford.edu, 2023).

#### **IV. UTILISATION OF MEDIA FOR PEACEBUILDING**

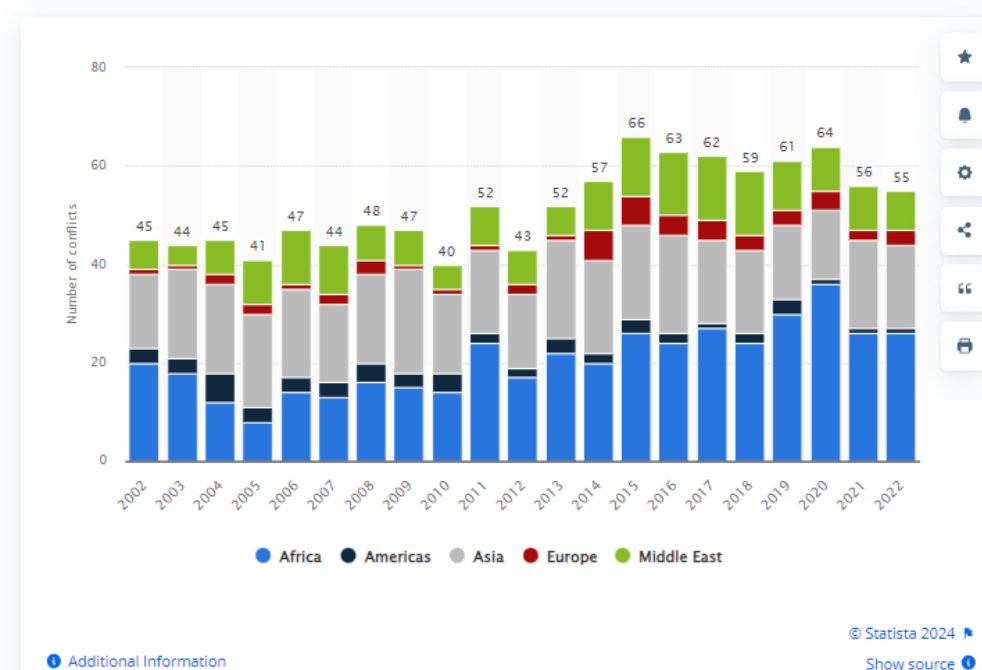
It has been observed and discussed by the experts concerning how the media might be utilised to actualise the peace process. However, sometimes the media is also influenced or rather checked intending to disseminate only half-truths. Such practices include legal or arbitrary means to intimidate fair journalism in conflict zones. According to the opinion of Allen & Stremlau, (2005), censoring the media facilitates the specific social segments in utilising the data according to their interests and preferences. As a result, international organisations and development cooperation agencies have been advocating for the free press to provide the space for the aggrieved to raise their voice against injustice. In the regions witnessing consistent conflict, the insurance of the freedom of the press by the propagation of market democracy by the concerned authorities often derails and sometimes hinders peacekeeping efforts. This is because freedom of the press in conflict zones is often under threats from distinct sides that require strong adherence to political ideologies and legal obligations which is not possible during ongoing hostilities. It requires the peacebuilding agents to install such ideologies and legal knowledge from scratch which would eventually delay the much-needed ceasefires and peacekeeping endeavours.

However, in the view of Bratić, (2006), knowledge and information obtained through media reports facilitate in obtaining security to some extent. This occurs because the journalists attempt to provide practical data about the severe conflict zones, supplies for civilians, degree of violence and even potential attacks or locations of such hostilities. Scholars have often opined that media has the potential to flare up conflict or pave the way for peacebuilding endeavours. According to the perspective of Bratić, (2006), media exhibit the capacity of facilitating the peacekeeping attempts by countering or eliminating the war propaganda.

The advancements in the technological fields have revolutionised the traditional communication system. This might be observed from the report that about 5.3 billion people had access to internet connections as of the year 2022 indicating that 66% of the global population has been using the internet (cia.gov, 2024). The penetration of internet connection to distinct parts of the world has facilitated the emergence of a new media trend. The introduction of social media platforms has been expanding the scope of reporting for the media channels as well as for independent journalists. The ability of social networking sites to address millions of audiences across the world is leveraged by the media channels and such independent journalists to report on practical situations during conflicts from the ground zero.

With the advocacy and encouragement of international organisations accompanied by the consideration of the welfare of the global civil society, peace journalism has been gradually increasing its grasp in conflict zones. The media channels as well as reports demonstrate their objective to assist the peacebuilding process by focusing on highlighting the causes behind the conflict and its impact on the civilians. In the view of Aslam, (2016), peace journalism is based on the practice of facilitating peacebuilding, highlighting the truth, focusing on common people and assisting the resolution of such conflicts. However, peace journalism in this complex geopolitical order often faces several challenges that make it difficult to be executed.

### Number of state-based conflicts worldwide from 2002 to 2022, by region



**Figure 1: Number of state-based conflicts worldwide from 2002 to 2022, by region**

[Source: statista, 2023]

The graph recorded the number of state-based conflicts between 2002 and 2022 in distinct regions of the world. The graphical data indicates the increase in the occurrences of such hostilities since 2002. In the year 2002, 45 state-based wars occurred which accelerated to 66 in the year 2015. The year 2022 has witnessed only 55 armed feuds between different states across the world (statista.com, 2023).

The information about the conflicts was received by millions of civilians through the news that was broadcasted, reported and disseminated by journalists and media channels using traditional sources as well as on different social media platforms. However, the media has not been able to assist international organisations, geopolitical endeavours as well as negotiating agents in

fostering peace and stabilising those regions. The key reason behind the incapability of peace journalism is the result of censorship as well as the utilisation of arbitrary force on the media. The journalists in conflict zones are often subjected to atrocities as well as legal actions. The approach of peace journalism in accomplishing its goal of reporting - 'the truth', is often suppressed by the oppressors by killing the reporters and journalists.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

It has been observed that the media can set a narrative for its profit or demonstrate a humanitarian approach during geopolitical turmoils. Media is an immensely useful medium to convey effective messages and foster peace in regions suffering from consistent conflict. However, civil society as well as the concerned peacekeeping institutions might utilise the Model of Inverted Trident (Aslam, 2016). This model suggests the utilisation of the potential of three stakeholders including- researchers, journalists as well as peace workers to foster peace in the regions facing conflicts. The utilisation of this model would help in actualising the peacekeeping efforts by using the power of media and journalists to investigate, identify and project 'the truth' in front of the world without any external influence or motivation to set a narrative. However, the concerned authorities might also explore potential strategies to prevent the media from setting narratives that reflect the capacity to flare up conflicts. This article, therefore, has attempted to provide a holistic evaluation of the media including its advantages and drawbacks concerning conflicts while highlighting its role in peacebuilding.

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