EXPLORING INDIAN PRINT MEDIA'S NEWS FRAMING OF THE INDIA-CHINA LAC STANDOFF MAY-JULY 2020: PERSPECTIVES FROM 'PEACE JOURNALISM'

Manya Saini, Symbiosis International Deemed University

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the news framing of the India-China border standoff at the line of actual control (LAC) between May to July 2020. The three-month standoff at the disputed border led to a violent clash in the Galwan region with several military casualties. The Galwan Clash was covered extensively by the media and has become a landmark in the present Sino-Indian relations. This paper employs the Peace Journalism framework to assess the orientation of three newspapers, The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu, on the established war and peace indicators. The study using content analysis of 495 news stories over the specified period, found that the news in all three national English newspapers was slanted towards the war orientation focused largely on the visible effects of the conflict, casualties, dehumanization of the opposite side, and seeking retribution.

Keywords: India-China LAC standoff, China conflict, Peace Journalism, Indian Print Media.

INTRODUCTION

Sino-Indian relations since the time of India's independence have been marked by several border disputes along the Line of Control. However, the recent standoff between the two countries is significant due to the casualties of the soldiers on both sides during the Galwan clash. The tensions began in mid-May as China asserted that the Indian troops were trespassing and building an illegal bridge in the disputed area. Both sides at three primary areas of Pangong Tso, Galwan Valley, and Gogra Hot Springs have regularly deployed troops and the sites are patrolled by the armed forces of both countries. The conflict had implications and received reactions from a wide range of spheres including political, social, economic, and military. The extensive media coverage following the Galwan clash has resulted in polarized perceptions of the dispute and heightened geopolitical tensions.

This paper critically studies the framing of conflict news among three national daily newspapers of India, The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu. The media covered the clash and its aftermath extensively focusing on the loss of lives, protests, Chinese mobile application ban, and the statements by politicians of different Indian political parties. The issue was reported extensively by international media publications as well including the New York Times, The Guardian, and British Broadcasting Network among others. The issues amid the COVID- 19 pandemic gained international importance from countries like the United States, Russia, and France.

Through the course of the standoff, there were repeated claims by the Chinese diplomats and government officials which claimed that the Indian media's coverage of the issue was hampering the resolution efforts of the nations. Many Indian media houses in return accused the

Chinese government and private companies of censoring content and deleting incriminating information from various platforms.

The tension heightened amid the coverage of the call for retaliation after the loss of lives and injury of the martyrs at Galwan Valley. India's public posture towards China and the overall relations between both countries have significantly been altered and is now guided by unilateralism. The border dispute has played a major role in mainstreaming the anti-China sentiment in the country driven by the media houses in all forms, including print, broadcast, and online.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Peace Journalism

The world today accesses visuals of wars and border conflicts through a technologically equipped media which remains at the forefront of nations being connected. The first conception of 'peace journalism' as a theoretical framework that charts out the media's role as an agent that actively seeks conflict resolution was theorized by (Galtung, 2003). Peace journalism as a theoretical and conceptual framework presents itself as a 'High Road' alternate to the traditional understanding of war and the "*low road*" war journalism, offering a channel to alienate the profession from its classic and established, "*objectivity*." (Galtung, 2003).

The motivations for deploying peace journalism are varied; however, it primarily focuses on removing the rift or polarisation between the opposed parties, by not demonising one to support the other. The media in this scenario does not set the stage for conflict (Mcgoldrick & Lynch, 2001). The premise for peace journalism is set in the tenets of public and development journalism, all three of which advocate for a non-objective, self-conscious intervention on the agency of the journalist overlooking the agenda as a whole.

Tehranian (2002) has written that "*ethically responsible journalism is a sine qua none of peace journalism.*" However, the pertinent question in the reportage from a peace journalism lens is how a story will help in de-escalating a conflict as opposed to polarizing it. This is without compromising on investigation and dialogue in the public sphere which presents to the readers a balanced perspective on the conflict, war, and violence of the situation. Howard (2002) wrote about the war - peace dichotomy stating, "*media can be a double-edged sword. It can be a frightful weapon of violence when it propagates messages of intolerance and/or disinformation that manipulate public sentiment.*"

To assess the value and existence of both concepts Galtung (2003) has proposed a theoretical framework which assesses the content orientation on several contrasting standards between peace and war journalism namely-
1.   Peace / Conflict Oriented - War / Violence Oriented
2.   Truth Oriented - Propaganda Oriented
3.   People-Oriented - Elite Oriented
4.   Solution-Oriented - Victory Oriented

From a purely normative standpoint, the model is tilted in favour of the peace journalism standards; however, the real world of war reporting requires a less black and

white approach to its analysis. Most media, it is noted, a stand somewhere in the middle towards the beginning of most conflicts, its orientation, however, becomes clear when the situation peaks and reaches the pinnacle.

There have been claims by practitioners and theorists across the world that in actual practice peace journalism is equivalent to "*imaginary*" journalism which disregards factors that play at the macro-level of editorial decision making such as ownership and institutional inclinations. Lee & Maslog (2005) argued that the coverage and reporting of war are embedded in the news value of a conflict; it is the primary reason why war reportage is considered a tool to boost circulation and ratings across mediums.

Based on the propaganda model of media devised by Herman & Chomsky (2010) in their work, 'Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media', (1988), David Edwards and David Cromwell, founders of Media Lens, a British media analysis website have found numerous instances where the media plays an importantrole in the promotion of wars.

According to Thussu & Freedman (2003), media coverage of conflicts in the post-Cold War era is divided primarily into three categories: firstly, ones where the geo-strategic and economic interests are the motive, for instance, the war in Iraq for the control of oil as a resource; secondly, those which emerge out of identities which are ethnic or nationalistic such as those in former Yugoslavia, and lastly, the 'invisible' conflicts which are under the radar of the international media, the central examples of this are the wars in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In most cases of perceived international importance in such a scenario, the West led by the United States is framed in the media as the peace-maker.

However, peace journalism scholars do not underscore the role that government and commercial institutions can play while framing media content however they do put their faith in the agency of the journalist and alternative practices. This is in particular associated with societies going through a transitional phase or a crisis. For instance, it was found that while radio was used to escalate tension through the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, however, the reportage of post-2007 elections violence in Kenya showed an inclination towards peace journalism (Onyebadi & Oyedeji, 2011).

Approaches to Studying Peace Journalism

Peace Journalism scholars have devised three frameworks under which the practice of the stream has so far operated across the world-first is when a conscious decision is made to implement it during specific times and places, second is the group that practices it without being consciously aware that it is being adopted. Most commonly, this occurs when the coverage tries to accommodate both sides of the issue. Peace Journalism by accident when it is consistent with the prevailing objectivity and standard media practices is the last framework.

When considering peace journalism as an alternate media reality, it is important to note that decisions are based on expected outcomes. It gives journalists the recognition of being a mediator or facilitator in a conflict as opposed to simply a neutral observer or commenter in line with its traditional role. However, it is a contentious issue with scholars

of media ethics divided on whether or not journalists should take on the role in the first place.

Different theorists have suggested ways to alter the present media structure especially objectivity and ideologies, to help peace journalism permeate. Tehranian (2002) has proposed actively working to pluralise media ownership as a way of producing inclusive and diverse content. In a bid to balance the flow of information, Tehranian (2002) has suggested founding a "*World Media Development Bank*" to help disadvantaged groups find adequate representation. Lynch (2013), on the other hand, has suggested the use of 'media activism' through which is defined as "*campaigning through the media and campaigning on the media,*" to bring to the forefront the shortcomings of the existing media hierarchy.

A more practical and application-based approach has been put forward by Shinar (2004) who has argued that it can be inducted into conventional media with a few techniques. He proposes the use of present news values in a bid to promote positive attitudes towards peace and peace coverage. Secondly, increasing the newsworthiness of stories on peace. Thirdly, setting up policies and sanctions which can work to restrain propaganda and extraneous pressure. Finally, the encouragement of "*media peace discourse*" in the public sphere not in contrast but rather complementary and consistent with news values.

Social media, in particular, has opened a world of new policies, though it comes with significant challenges of misinformation, the platforms offer a unique outlet for the people to express their views, as it remains largely free from traditional media constraints. The power of online as an outlet of peace was exemplified with the foundation SouriaLi, online radio in Syria which was founded by independent journalists. The programs were centered around the life raw stories on the implications of conflict and war using people and the impact on their daily lives.

Hanitzsch (2004) has propounded the idea that the focus of war journalism during a military conflict will always remain on visible violence and its consequences such as the death toll and property damage. In contrast, the focus of its counterpart, peace journalism will be on exploring the background under which a particular issue developed. It will focus on making the culprits on both ends accountable in a bid to bring transparency to the audience.

Gavilán (2011) argues for an understanding of peace journalism through the lens of the media framing theory. The basic assumption of the study is that every news has a specific frame that is grounded in a reality that ascertains its approach. It can thus be understood as "*peace framing.*" Thus, the coverage of news has a frame of peace that works as both the approach as well the goal of the writer.

Galtung (2003) has been a harsh critic of Peace Journalism as a concept because of its "*contempt for objectivity*" and has put forward the opinion that the central commitment and goal of a journalist must be objective truth. However, Peleg (2007) has responded to this argument by stating that the concept of objectivity in the profession has always been elusive, adding that it was a goal that was unattainable. He says that instead of

striving for absolute objectivity, the focus should be on achieving a balanced and neutral perspective.

Conflict Reporting in India

In the Indian context, the reportage on the conflicted Indo-Pakistan border and the Sino-Indian border is of interest to the whole world for a multitude of reasons. The primary reason among them is that all three states possess nuclear weapons and any escalation since the late 1990s has led to fears of these weapons of mass destruction being deployed. In such a situation, the framework of peace journalism advocating media frame news with sensitivity has extensive application possibilities.

An extremely critical juncture in India-Pakistan relations and a turning point in contemporary times was the terror attack in Mumbai on 26th November 2008. Malaviya (2019) tracked the conflict reporting by Indian media outlets to conclude that a majority of the mainstream sentiment of Indian newspapers was focused solely on warmongering. Many newspapers took a combative comparative stance on the military capabilities of both nations to suggest that should it come to a war, which one would prevail. A significant instance of this is the report by Nirmal Pathak, titled, "*Pakistan does not stand anywhere near to India*". The article highlighted that the Indian army and air force were superior when compared directly with those of Pakistan.

Khan (2019) found that a similar stance is echoed in the coverage of the Kashmir conflict in the leading English daily of Pakistan, DAWN, starting from the death of Burhan Wani in 2016 till 30th June 2018. The research concludes that war hysteria dominated the reportage with hateful speeches and insightful words of prominent leaders making the headlines. Peaceful narratives were put on the backburner, while death and destruction largely occupied the public domain. A significant section of editorial neglect was found in the coverage of the discussions and resolutions of the United Nations which were only mentioned in passing. The study was conducted using the war and peace framework indicators mentioned above created by (Galtung et al., 2013).

The India-Pakistan, 'Aman ki Asha' (Hope for Peace) Peace Journalism Project, 2010

The 'Aman ki Asha' project was launched by Times of India in India and The JangGroup in Pakistan, to establish and facilitate dialogue between the two governments and encourage conversation in a bid to contribute to the peace between both countries. The Aman ki Asha project was launched with a joint editorial published on the front page of both publications. It had a peace anthem penned by Indian poet Gulzar and sung by RahatFateh Ali Khan and Shankar Mahadevan.

The professed objective of the project was to start, "*an honest and exhaustive debate on all contentious issues between the two countries, such as Kashmir, water, terrorism, Siachen, Sir Creek, etc.*" On its official website, the project is deemed successful and a "*gamechanger*" because of the ties it claims to have created between the business communities of both nations which culminated in the organization of two of the biggest conferences in history for economic cooperation.

Batoo et al. (2015) found that print media played a significant and constructive role in facilitating talks and promoting the peace process during times of tension and solving conflicts. The study also said that the Times of India (TOI) had shown far more positive content towards Pakistan than any other news publication to compare. The same applied to the TOI's editorial section where 23 positive editorial articles were published, while 1 was neutral and none were negative. In contrast, The Dawn did not apply the project to its editorials, publishing 3 positive, 3 negatives, and no neutral articles throughout the period.

The scope and limitations of peace journalism, particularly in the Indian context, is subject to the inclinations of the media houses and specific editorial policies. Globally, several examples have proven that the implementation of this as the framing strategy for reporting conflict and stories of war can increase readership. The concept challenges the prevailing and long-established news values which dictate the relationship between war and the media especially between countries like India, Pakistan, China, etc where the roots of contemporary conflict are historic.

There are several strategies through which the inclination of a media organization towards the ability to implement alternative media practices and the subsequent effect on the consumer. There has been a radical change in the way media is consumed in the age of social media and the emergence of online portals which have been left unsearched. These platforms differ from traditional constraints of media giving a greater and heightened sense of freedom to both the journalists and the readers.

OBJECTIVES

To study the editorial standards of leading national print media houses in India from the lens of peace journalism.

To identify if choosing a particular form, between war and peace journalism affects the readership of the newspaper.

To identify if there is a shift in mainstream media from the traditional war approach towards the newly conceptualized peace approach.

METHODOLOGY

The primary research is a content analysis of the reportage of the India-China border standoff conflict in the three national daily Indian newspapers in the English language, The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu. The sections of the newspapers being studied are the front page and the national pages. The duration of the analysis is from May 5, marking the beginning of the bridge construction in the Galwan region till July 5, after the disengagement and pullback process was announced.

The framework to analyse the content and editorial choices will be focused on the front page, national page, and editorial page of the dailies. The paper uses the concept and framework of 'Peace Journalism' developed by Galtung (2003) as a model that guides the analysis. As a case study to study the reportage of conflict, it focuses on the coverage of the border standoff between India and China, starting from 11th May 2020 to 5th July 2020. The conflict peaked during the violent clash at Galwan Valley on June 15th wherein troops from both sides lost their

lives. This was followed by a massive uproar in India, riding on the anti-China sentiment created as a dual productof the clash as well as the rise in COVID-19 cases in the country.

Theoretically, Galtung et al. (2013) has proposed a coding standard to assess the application of the peace-war journalism dichotomy and has given a table to analyse the same. Every story published by each media house on the India-China LAC standoff during the specified period willserve as one unit of analysis on the war-peace indicators.

Predominantly this includes:
1.   Peace / Conflicted Oriented - War / Violence Oriented
2.   Truth Oriented - Propaganda Oriented
3.   People-Oriented - Elite Oriented
4.   Solution-Oriented - Victory Oriented

In terms of the literature, the method has been adopted by several researchers to assess the permeation and application of the peace journalism framework and mindset such as Shendurnikar (2011); Khan (2019) in India. The researchers applied the Galtung (2003) framework for content analysis in the India-Pakistan conflict.

ANALYSIS

For this study, each story published in the three newspapers, The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu was a unit of analysis. The stories were classified as belonging to the War-Peace framework developed by Galtung et al. (2013). There were a total of 8 indicators, wherein peace/conflict-oriented, truth-oriented, people-oriented, and solution-oriented were identified as overall peace indicators. Similarly, war/violence oriented, propaganda oriented, elite oriented, and victory oriented were categorised as war indicators. If a story was found to have more of the peace indicators, it is placed as a peace story and vice versa.

RQ$_1$: To study the editorial standards of leading national print media houses in Indiafrom the lens of peace journalism.

According to the data, of the total 495 news stories published by the newspapers i.e. The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu on the India-China LAC Standoff between May 11, 2020, to 5th July 2020, the war journalism approach was dominant. Among the total 495 stories, 418 contained peace indicators while 77 contained war indicators. This shows an orientation of 84.45% of the stories to be reported from the traditional war framing, in comparison 15.55% were reported from the lens of peace journalism.

Table 1 NEWS FRAMING OF THE PUBLISHED ARTICLES			
War JournalismIndicators	N (%)	ce JournalismIndicators	N (%)
War/violence-oriented	295 (59.6%)	Peace/Conflict-oriented	7 (1.41%)
Propaganda-oriented	84 (16.97%)	Truth-oriented	30 (6.06%)
Elite-oriented	29 (5.86%)	People-oriented	12 (2.42%)
Victory-oriented	10 (2.02%)	Solution-oriented	28 (5.66%)
Total	**418 (84.45%)**	**Total**	**77 (15.55%)**

In the case of war indicators, as illustrated by Table 1, it was found that 295 (59.6%) stories were war/violence oriented geared towards 'Us versus Them' narrative built on

seeing 'them' as the fundamental perpetrators of the conflict. It further shows a reactive editorial choice, which only focuses on the visible effects of the conflict, and remains concentrated on the conflict area and prevailing therein. Similarly, 84 (16.97%) stories were identified as propaganda oriented which were focused on the dehumanisation of the other side, in a bid to expose 'their' untruths, lies, and coverups. In the case of the third indicator, i.e. elite oriented, 29 (5.86%) stories were published focused solely on elite statements, peacemakers, and suffering of the able-bodied elite. Lastly, 10 (2.02%) stories were classified as victory oriented which largely focused on peace being identified as a ceasefire and the reestablishment of the controlled society through treaties and elite institutions.

In contrast, in the case of peace indicators, of the total 77 news stories, 7 (1.41%) were peace/conflict-oriented, focusing on the causes behind the conflict formation, giving an empathetic voice to all sides in open time and space. The reportage in this framework is preventive as opposed to reactive, which humanizes all sides. A total of 30 (6.06%) stories were identified as truth-oriented, which uncovered the cover-ups and lies on both sides of the conflict. For the third indicator, 12 (2.42%) stories published were classified as people-oriented, which sought to expose the suffering of the marginalized and give voice to the voiceless, bringing out the overall invisible effects of war. In the case of the fourth indicator, 28 (5.66%) stories were published, which were identified as solution-oriented, focused on highlighting peace initiatives, preventing further escalation, and ensuring reconciliation in the aftermath of the conflict.

RQ$_2$: To identify if choosing a particular form, between war and peace journalism affects the readership of the newspaper.

Among the newspapers studied, the highest readership according to the Indian Readership Survey (2019, Q1) was recorded by The Times of India, followed by Hindustan Times and The Hindu respectively. The coverage of the conflict varied across the newspaper in terms of the total number of stories published as well as the allocation of space on the front page as illustrated by Table 2.

Table 2 NUMBER OF STORIES PUBLISHED					
Newspaper	No. of war stories on thefront page	No. of war stories on thenational page	N (%)	No. of peace stories on the front page	No. of peace stories on thenational page	N (%)
Times of India	68	101	169 (87.11%)	12	13	25 (12.89%)
Hindustan Times	54	104	158 (90.29%)	4	13	17 (9.71%)
The Hindu	38	53	91 (72.22%)	20	15	35 (27.78%)

Times of India with the highest English national daily readership in India as per the report published by Indian Readership Survey (2019, Q4) covered the conflict with the maximum number of stories, i.e. 194 (39.19%) and published the maximum number of war journalism stories on both its front page and national pages which recorded 68 and 101 stories respectively. In comparison,

the newspaper published a combined total of 25 stories, where the peace indicators were dominant, distributed with 12 on the front and 13 on the national pages. Overall, the data indicates that the media coverage of the LAC standoff in the case of Times of India was oriented towards the war framework.

Hindustan Times in comparison published 158 (31.92%) news stories, oriented towards the war framework with 54 on the front and 104 on the national pages. In contrast, there were a total of 17 peace journalism stories, out of which 4 were on the front page, while 13 were published on the national pages. According to the data, Hindustan Times's coverage of the India-China LAC standoff shows an orientation towards the war indicators.

The Hindu over the specified period published a total of 126 (25.45%) news stories on the LAC standoff, allotting the conflict between India and China the least amount of coverage in comparison with the other two media organizations studied concerning the total number of stories published. It carried 91 stories oriented towards war indicators, while 35 were oriented towards peace indicators.

Significantly, while the Times of India published the maximum number of stories oriented towards war, in terms of percentage Hindustan Times was found to be the most focused towards traditional conflict reportage. The Hindu was similarly inclined towards war journalism; however, it had the highest number and percentage of peace-oriented stories.

RQ$_3$: To identify if there is a shift in mainstream media from the traditional war approach towards the newly conceptualized peace approach.

According to the study data, there is no change in the overall approach of media houses in the mainstream news space towards adopting non-traditional editorial choices towards peace journalism in the context of reporting geopolitical conflict between countries. The war journalism orientation remained the predominant choice. Significantly, The Hindu was the only organization to print more stories oriented towards peace on the front page than the national pages in the newspaper. In the case of Times of India and Hindustan Times, it was observed that less number of peace-oriented stories was published on the front page in contrast to the national pages of the newspaper.

DISCUSSION

The content analysis of the coverage of the India-China LAC Standoff throughout May - July 2020 by The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu shows a clear inclination towards the traditional war journalism. News is framed in a bid to increase advertising revenue, dependent largely on the rise in readership and circulation of the newspaper. Peace stories lack 'shock value' and do not appeal to the sentiments of the readers, thus remain less popular among mainstream newspapers.

Several scholars have argued that conflict reporting is naturally geared towards 'bad news' due to its very nature, however, Galtung(2003) and other peace journalists have disproved this claim stating that journalists are only trained in war news, and remain largely unaware of the alternatives. The coverage of the Indo-China LAC standoff reflects this approach as the voices of the marginalized sections such as the locals, families of those killed and injured, and other similar stakeholders remained largely missing. In contrast, the statements of the elite politicians and bureaucrats were amplified by the coverage. The narrative for the violent Galwan clash and its subsequent consequences

was similarly constructed to incline towards "*victory*" as opposed to the resolution.

While peace initiatives towards reconciliation and disengagement were not concealed by any newspaper, it was observed that the stories lacked depth and detail concerning how the process of resolution will be carried out. The focus of the stories remained on those brokering it, for instance, politicians and army personnel, however, the details of the result of the disengagement meetings remained to a large extent obscure.

CONCLUSION

The point of difference between the reportage remains the space allocation and the number of stories the newspapers published during the period under study. The coverage of the conflict remained dominated by war orientations across the three newspapers and its separate sections.

Mainstream media today, in particular, legacy print organizations need to radically reinvent their coverage style as the digital age rapidly erodes gatekeepers. Readers have access to a wide range of information that can be accessed through the internet instantly. Amid this print news that publishes stories that have already been broadcast or posted online faces a unique challenge that can only be overcome by conscious editorial decisions that make the information relevant even as it might be familiar. In this context, peace journalism provides these media houses the tools and analytical orientation to differentiate from other mediums. The stream of peace journalism is new and largely unexplored especially in today's time when misinformation and social media pose massive challenges to the profession.

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