

# **Pakistani News Media through the lens of Constructive Journalism: A ‘message system’ analysis**

This report has been produced by Uks Research Resource & Publication centre in collaboration  
with Deutsche Welle Akademie

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## **Abstract**

**Elements of constructive journalism render the conventional news message system fluid and flexible. This inherent fluidity is an opportunity for advocates of constructive journalism, as it is more malleable and likely to take a new shape than a rigid one. Through a multi-pronged approach, this study of cultural indicators, and constructive journalism deconstructs Pakistan's conventional news message system and proposes an amelioration model for practitioners as well as academics.**

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# Section - 1

## Framework

Media is a reflection of social relationships, institutional relationships and social formations. Through discourse media helps form and sustain existing power settings and social fabrics and is instrumental in enabling the rejection of old concepts and beliefs. By informing the audience about new power settings, it can cultivate a world of [hyper] reality around them, shaping the frame of references for them, and can impede the learning process by limiting the social discourse in certain directions. Mass storytelling has been used by a country's elite to create and maintain the symbolic environment around ordinary people [a nexus between state & media, see Gerbner 1998<sup>1</sup>]. Mass storytelling is one of the most powerful tools that can shape the course of history. From cave art to Roman wall graffiti, human beings have always had a passion for storytelling.

From early propaganda theorists to modern cultivation theorists of mass communication, media acts as a validation agent for certain power and social settings. It blurs the lines between the real-world and the bubble of a hyper-real world that it creates through its own discourse, for a mass audience. Storytelling is the major agent for societal discourse. In traditional societies like Pakistan this was the domain of family elders and in-person storytellers. Today media, be it electronic, print or digital has changed the family dynamic. Storytellers of past (i.e. parents, teachers etc.) have lost considerable control over the stories being told today. It can be said that many believe they have no choice but to consume mass media. Today mass communication has led to shared cultural outlooks and assumptions that are nurtured, maintained and reinforced by modern media in large communities over long periods of time. (Signorieli, 2015<sup>2</sup>)

In a video interview, professor of Communication George Gerbner, explains that communication is the series of visual, gestural and psychological codes, the non-random arrangement of events that has some significance. It is organisational knowledge that has something to say about every human and social situation, which has economic aspects, psychological aspects, historical and biological aspects.

After decades of media monitoring, content analysis and organisational audits, at Uks Research and Resource Centre we have been able to breakdown the current mechanised mass communication (news) in Pakistan to see the kind of messages being disseminated and cultivated. For instance, a gendered focus content analysis by Uks Research Centre, during COVID-19 revealed how the media shifted its focus and changed the dominant discourse within the short span of a month. A comparison of media reportage against a timeline revealed that both electronic and print media avoided reporting rape and sexual abuse in Ramzan, the Islamic holy month associated with abstinence and piety. At the same time mainstream media continued its reportage of crime stories that were deemed 'acceptable', likely because they were not of a sexual nature

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<sup>1</sup> Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass communication and society*, 1(3-4), 175-194.

<sup>2</sup> Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., & Signorielli, N. (2015). Yesterday's new cultivation, tomorrow. *Mass Communication and Society*, 18(5), 674-699.

Given the power of mass media and its hold over large audiences authors Karen McIntyre and Catherine Gyldensted, proposed, the expansion of the news process by introducing and defining the interdisciplinary concept of *constructive journalism*. By applying positive psychology techniques which recognises that negative experiences are a part of life and via research on resilience and growth it attempts to understand a more holistic sense of being.<sup>3</sup>

This interdisciplinary approach to journalism is an emerging concept, and there is no academically agreed-upon definition for it so far. Constructive journalism advocates that while journalism should remain true to its core principles, it must produce more productive and engaging coverage through a solution-oriented approach. Thus, after addressing the traditional 5Ws (who, what, when, where and why) of journalism should look into ‘What Now?’ and ‘How?’ The prevalence of clickbaits and sensationalism indicates that many audiences have a preference for news that has a negative bias. Yet, constructive journalism does not blame journalists for the pervasiveness of negative news. Constructive journalism asserts that it is not a new idea or an alien concept in the contemporary journalistic landscape. Instead it is a significant extension of regular journalism, which urges journalists to be more interpretative of news story and to start incorporating positive elements into conventional reporting, while remaining dedicated to accuracy, truth and balance. In short it is a socially responsible form of journalism.<sup>4</sup>

In a collaborative effort Deutsche Welle Akademie and Uks Research Centre, have initiated an internal (organisational and academic) discourse on the topic in the context of Pakistan. This short media analysis looks at print and electronic media reportage through the lens of constructive journalism with the help of self-designed peer-reviewed metrics for content analysis based on the basic principles of constructive journalism as elaborated by Karen McIntyre and Catherine Gyldensted.

### ➤ **Presumptive Profile**

This study presumes that there is a significant void in the traditional practice of journalism that can be filled by constructive journalism. The purpose of this content analysis is to look at the media through the pervasive frames introduced by constructive journalism, to contrast the institutional orientations of electronic media vis-à-vis English and Urdu print media, towards news items and to identify the potential areas of strengths.

### **Purpose of this Study: Content Analysis**

Worldwide there is increasing discourse on this topic worldwide which necessitates stirring up the contemporary journalism landscape in Pakistan by initiating a debate around constructive journalism. As constructive journalism grows is still a new concept in Pakistan it was expected that there will be a significant amount of criticism and resistance to it by the practitioner of

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<sup>3</sup> [file:///E:/Ali%20Nisar%20\(Office\)/DW/Project%20Activities/pdfcookie.com\\_kate-hefferon-ilona-boniwell-positive-psychology.pdf](file:///E:/Ali%20Nisar%20(Office)/DW/Project%20Activities/pdfcookie.com_kate-hefferon-ilona-boniwell-positive-psychology.pdf),

<sup>4</sup> [file:///E:/Ali%20Nisar%20\(Office\)/DW/Project%20Activities/2403-Article%20Text-17281-2-10-20180130.pdf](file:///E:/Ali%20Nisar%20(Office)/DW/Project%20Activities/2403-Article%20Text-17281-2-10-20180130.pdf)

journalism for operationalization and by academics in terms of conceptualization. Either way it is hoped that this analysis will be a stepping stone for future research on this subject.

To ground constructive journalism in the prevailing discourse in Pakistan, there was a need to examine the contemporary message system, and to analyse the trends and tropes that exist within the content of [news] media, and to validate the need for constructive journalism by contrasting the analysis of message system against already existing models and definitions of it. Though a very representative sample from media, content was monitored and analysed. The objectives of this content analysis are

1. To look into the existing message systems, and map out the trends and tropes within the content which can be contrasted against the guiding principles of constructive journalism.
2. To corroborate with the presumptive profile that there exists a void to be filled by constructive journalism.

To analyse the message system, we used insights from the second prong of a cultural indicators project in which a recorded system of messages are subjected to content analysis in order to reliably delineate selected features and trends in the news media. This was used to throw light upon our adaptation of GMMP's content analysis methodology.

## **Introduction**

Almost half (47.7%) of the Pakistani population follow current events 'somewhat' through news media.<sup>5</sup> Although entertainment media garners (55%), more eyeballs than news media (19%) yet the latter holds the significant sway over its consumers.<sup>6</sup> Globally there is, increasing mistrust of the news media, and an growing inclination towards digital news platforms. While this is a major threat to conventional journalism it also serves as an impetus for it to assume new responsibilities of societal wellbeing. By incorporating more nuanced and democratic conversations and also by including solutions in their story's media can give incorporate the promising and the positive in its story. According to modern cultivation analysts, a message system is the collective stream of major messages systematically generated regardless of medium. Monitoring activity at Uks Research Centre shows that there is very little variation between digital and conventional media. There is a strong knowledge gap in Pakistan that about the procedural and operational facets of social media vis-à-vis conventional media, we can safely say that the major news being communicated on digital platforms is controlled by the same big conglomerates that control traditional media. Journalists are simultaneously producing stories for both conventional and digital media. By sampling representative content from the conventional message system this study explores holistic trends and tropes from within the message systems. This study raises the questions and looks for the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Pakistan-research-brief-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://pide.org.pk/pdf/brief/The-Electronic-Media-Economy-in-Pakistan-Knowledge-Brief-35-2021.pdf>

answers about general journalistic practices in Pakistan by taking frames and principles of constructive journalism into account.

Constructive journalism as argued by Karen takes a multi-pronged approach to address the social dilemmas related to journalistic practice. It applies positive psychology techniques for functioning. The positive psychology methods which are incorporated in an ideal constructive story, act as the barometer (metrics) for news analysis of message system in this study. From the well-being model of the world to evocation of positive emotions and PEMRA elements in news, all these derivatives of positive psychology have laid the foundation for basic principles of a good constructive story. For detailed insights into the intersection of positive psychology and principles of constructive journalism readers can refer to Karen (et al. 2017). This study is not a literature review and/or a theoretical dissertation and will use relevant aspects of constructive journalism to explain the methodology for content analysis in the next section.

An adaptation of the GMMP methodology was used while subjecting recorded content to the process of content analysis. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), WACC's flagship activity, is the largest and longest-running research on gender in the world's news media. Pakistan has been the part of three consecutive Global Media Monitoring Projects (GMMP) all of which were coordinated by Uks Research Centre. GMMP with its comprehensive methodology guide for both long- and short-term media monitoring provides an insight into how the conventional and digital message system could be analysed quantitatively and qualitatively by employing the indicators provided in the methodology guide. Media monitors are provided with coding sheets and reference sheets to understand the coding process, and to execute it. The same techniques for quantitative and qualitative analyses of news content were modified by adapting the indicators of constructive journalism.



## Section 2

### Methodology of the Study:

Experience shows that patterns of programming to which communities are regularly exposed over long period of time (Gerbner, 1998) cultivate stable and common conceptions of reality. To analyse collective sets of notions persisting in the message system generated by news media, we focused on reporting trends of conventional news primarily English and Urdu newspapers, and television channels in order to contrast the reporting pattern within the spectrum of the message system and to identify a possible void in the conventional news message system that can be filled by elements of constructive journalism.

### Method Used

A coding sheet was designed for short term media monitoring, while adapting the basic monitoring principles of GMMP in accordance with the requisites of constructive journalism. Along with the coding sheet Uks' media monitors were provided with the reference sheet that contained the monitoring indicators.

#### ➤ The indicators

<i>INDICATOR</i>	<i>INTERPERTATION</i>
<i>DATE</i>	PUT IN THE DATE OF REPORTING
<i>HEADLINE</i>	COPY PASTE THE HEADLINE (ENGLISH & URDU), FOR TELEVISION, TRANSCRIBE THE HEADLINE IN BEST POSSIBLE OBJECTIVE WAY
<i>SCORE OF HEADLINES</i>	SCORE THE HEADLINE ACCORDING TO THE ATTACHED SCORE CARD.
<i>NEWS OUTLET</i>	WRITE DOWN THE NAME OF NEWS ORGANIZATION
<i>SOURCE</i>	JOURNALIST/ SOURCE OF NEWS STORY
<i>NEWS TYPE</i>	THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF NEWS STORIES FOR OUR MONITORING EXERCISE 1. <b>HARD NEWS</b> (serious news of widespread import, concerning politics, foreign affairs, or the like, as distinguished from routine news items, feature stories, or human-interest stories.) 2. <b>SOFT NEWS</b> (news that is a mixture of information and entertainment, often relating to people's private lives). 3. <b>BREAKING NEWS</b>
<i>TYPES OF NEWS ITEMS</i>	FOLLOWING ARE THE TYPES 1. NEWS STORY

***LINK***  
***SCORE OF NEWS***

***REMARKS***

2. COLUMN/EDITORIAL
3. MAGAZINE FEATURE/ARTICLE
4. LTE

PASTE THE LINK TO STORY OR BULLETIN

SCORE THE WHOLE STORY ACCORDING TO THE COLOUR CARD ATTACHED, PLEASE NOTE THAT IN SCORE OF THE HEADLINE YOU HAVE TO SCORE ONLY THE HEADLINE, BUT HERE YOU OUGHT TO READ THOROUGHLY, AND THEN CATEGORIZE THE WHOLE STORY AS MENTIONED IN THE COLOUR CARD YOUR REMARKS ABOUT THE STORY, IF WARRANTED

➤ **Score of Headlines**

Constructive journalism argues that news serves different purposes, one of which is to alert the public of threats, which is why traditionally news stories are often negative and conflict-based Masthead or headlines, flashy bold and catchy, usually garner more eyeballs than the full detail of the stories, be it body of news in print or follow-up detail in electronic news bulletin. The traditional news culture today circles around the commercial needs for stories to be conflict and doom based. More breaking news alerts, when they really aren't that urgent, more stories which lack quality, conflict-based dramatised headlines constitute most of the content of conventional journalism today. Print and electronic media headlines were rated separately and a score card was designed based on GMMP's score card for qualitative analysis. The score card consists of a scoring system between 1 to 4 where 1 is the lowest score and 4 is the highest.

Score of Headlines	
<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nuances included in the headline <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ethical Headline - sensitive to gender and other minority considerations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Bleeding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dramatized language not used	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nuances included in the headline <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ethical Headline - sensitive to gender and other minority considerations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Bleeding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dramatized language not used
<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nuances included in the headline <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ethical Headline - sensitive to gender and other minority considerations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Bleeding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dramatized language not used	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nuances included in the headline <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ethical Headline - sensitive to gender and other minority considerations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Bleeding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dramatized language not used

To get a score of 4, a headline must tick all 4 metrics (indicators). For a score of 3 a headline must check at least three metrics and so forth. These indicators are derived from the discourses available online as well as Uks' own understanding of gender and minority sensitivity within the language of news headlines.

- **Nuances**

Given the constraints of word and time limits, headlines cannot incorporate all pillars of constructive journalism while conveying the event. Sometimes, breaking news headlines cannot offer solutions and evoke positive sentiments because it is usually too early. Often journalists have to wait for events to unfold, in order to delineate solutions. Similarly, word and time limits don't allow elements of conversation to be included. However, nuance, can be incorporated in headlines if worked carefully, no matter what type of news it is (hard, soft, breaking). So constructive journalism expects from the practice of regular journalism to include nuances in the headline of news stories.

A news story from Geo News (online) is presented here as an example to explain the concept of nuances in headlines more accurately.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.geo.tv/latest/363666-sinopharm-sinovac-astrazeneca-vaccine-shortage-hits-karachi>



## **Sinopharm, Sinovac, AstraZeneca vaccine shortages hit Karachi**



### **A subheading two scrolls down – same story**

#### **Pakistan seeks to procure millions of doses**

Earlier this week, Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination officials had said the federal government aims to procure more than 30 million more vaccine doses in August.

The officials said the vaccines are being purchased to keep the inoculation process smooth as the country battles the fourth COVID-19 wave.

On Monday, Pakistan achieved the one-million daily doses mark, with Islamabad becoming the first city to get 50% of its eligible population vaccinated with at least one dose.

It is obvious that conventional media tends to report the news story chronologically such that positive aspects are either ignored or incorporated at the end of the stories in a line or two, thus significantly decreasing the possibilities of positive cultivation and systematically generating the negativity bias among viewership.

#### ○ **Gender and Minority Sensitivity – Ethical Considerations**

For several years Uks has been working on creating a voluntary and sustainable system of gender ethics among news media practitioners. Our research on media trends and language tropes show that media practitioner usually treats the issue of gender sensitivity casually and focus on producing content that echoes existing stereotypes and strengthen them. (link to be added)/

A prime example of this is Dawn's headline reporting the motorway gang rape in Lahore which caught the public's imagination.

## Rape victim travelled without husband's permission

Ikram Junaidi | Published September 29, 2020

**ISLAMABAD: Lahore's Capital City Police Officer Sheikh, who has been facing criticism for his comments after the incident of gang rape on the motorway this month, on Monday again blamed the woman for travelling without seeking permission from her husband.**

While briefing the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights in Islamabad, he suggested that court martial be allowed to be held against the police force.

However, the committee's chairman, Mustafa Nawaz Khan, of the Peoples Party, said the state had a duty to protect its citizens by finding out why an individual was travelling.

## Police response to motorway rape: Senate panel slams CCPO for conflicting remarks

By News Report | September 29, 2020

LAHORE: The city's top cop has once again landed himself in hot waters during a hearing of the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights to talk about the motorway rape case, on Monday, Geo News reported.

Headlines ought to be carefully crafted to ensure that no bias or prejudice is conveyed. In this instance the newspaper quoted the police chief, who had expressed disapproval by emphasizing that the rape victim was traveling without her husband's permission. By turning the police chief's statement into a headline, the newspaper enabled his assertion, which went unchallenged. It is only when the story is read in its entirety that it becomes clear that the police chief was heavily criticized for this assertion which was not relevant to the case and which absolved him of the police force's responsibility to ensure the public's safety.

- **Not bleeding**

Much of the content created as part of journalism induces a sense of gloom about the state of the world exacerbating fears, promoting black-and-white stereotypes and emphasizing conflict. The content was thus monitored for news that promoted a sense of impending doom.

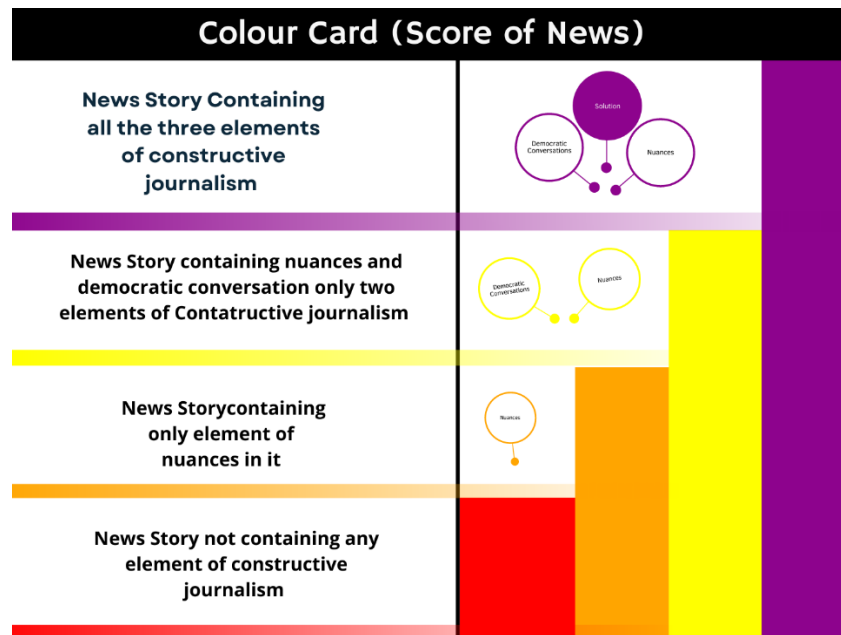
- **Dramatised language**

Journalism is the filter between reality and the perception of reality. However, by employing theatrical vocabulary and hyperbole, headlines are often crafted to elicit strong feelings. It is not surprising then that surveys that measure the gap between facts and the populations' perception of facts show large gaps. The content was monitored for the type of language used.

- **Colour Code (SCORE OF NEWS)**

The print and electronic news items were graded on the basis of 3 principles of constructive journalism. The news items which contained all three elements it received the highest score (purple) by the media monitors. If the item contained 2 elements of constructive journalism, it received the second highest score (yellow colour), and so on.

The three elements of constructive journalism are solution orientation, nuances and democratic conversation.



## Sample

In order to subject the representative data from the message system of news media to the process of content analysis, a team of 3 media monitors at Uks scrutinised 2 English and 1 Urdu national newspaper and the news bulletin of 2 national television channels. As per the methodology guide for GMMP, Uks' media monitors coded 12 to 14 news items – news stories from national pages and all the items from op-ed pages [adaptation], daily for a week starting 11 December 2021, to 17 December 2021. Similarly, the media monitors observed the 9 PM [primetime] bulletin of 2 of the largest news channels, and coded 10 to 12 headlines [adaptation] and their news details. A detailed coded message system database of 517 news items was accumulated through this weeklong media monitoring exercise, which is presented and discussed in the following sections. MS Excel was used for statistical evaluation of the coded data and other graphical illustration. Besides the quantification of the data, media monitors also subjectively graded the news stories as per the metrics provided to them after developing a deep understanding on the subject. The data from each monitor was then peer reviewed by other media monitors. For this purpose, media monitors shuffled their assigned news outlet with their peers and discussed the qualitative aspects [grading of news stories] rectifying any omissions upon identification.

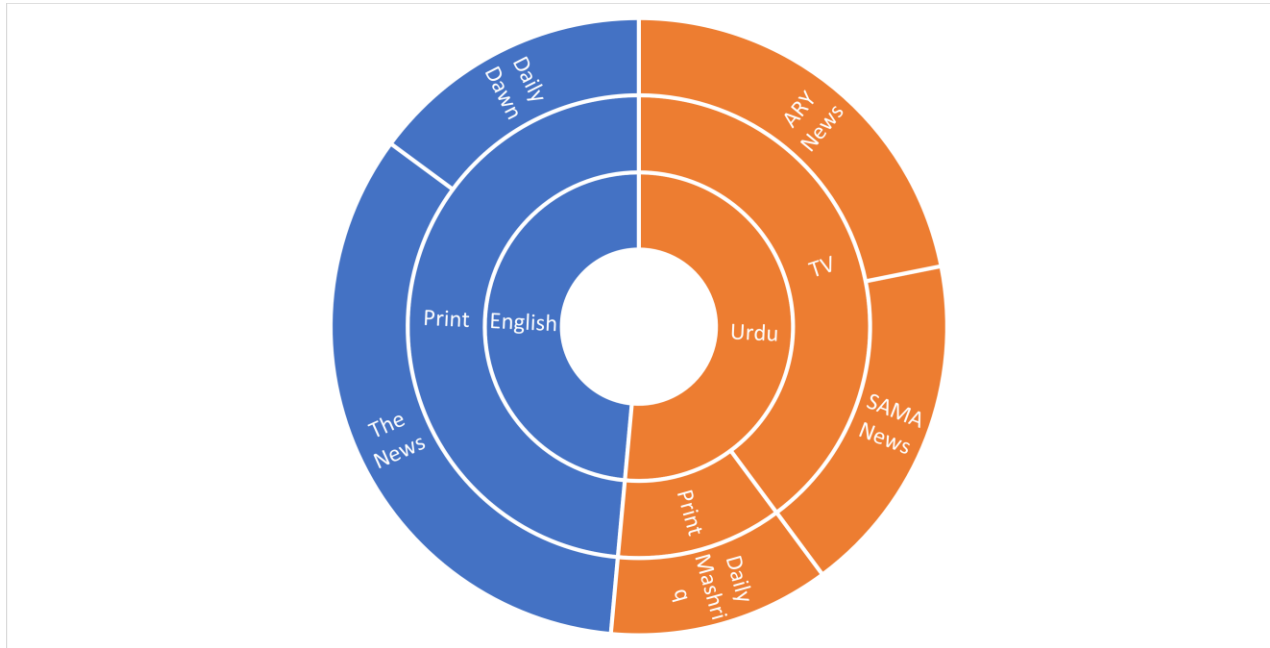
## **Monitoring and Evaluation Tools**

A simple coding sheet (Excel) along with a comprehensive reference sheet (explained above) was shared with the media monitors. Uks' trainers on constructive journalism who were trained by Deutsche Welle Akademie, walked the media monitors through the process of conceptualization and operationalization of the content analysis exercise. The accumulated database was then further analysed in Excel by the researcher.

### Section 3

#### Pakistan’s Conventional news media through the lens of Constructive Journalism: Illustration

Of the 517 English and Urdu news items that were monitored, 206 were from the electronic media while the remaining 311 were from print media. At 51.4%, the total number of Urdu news items slightly outweigh the English News items (Print and electronic) media



The source of news item includes male sources (journalist/ writer/presenter) female sources (journalist/ writer/ presenter) and non- detectable sources (staff reporter, general correspondent etc.). The female to male source ratio in print media is less than the female to male ratio in electronic media

<i>Print</i>		<i>TV</i>	
<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
151	25	70	110

In Pakistani news media hard news far outweighs the soft news, what with the bombardment of political – conflict-based hard news stories. Exposure to this deepens the void between the political and ideological factions of society, and is reflected within the message system.

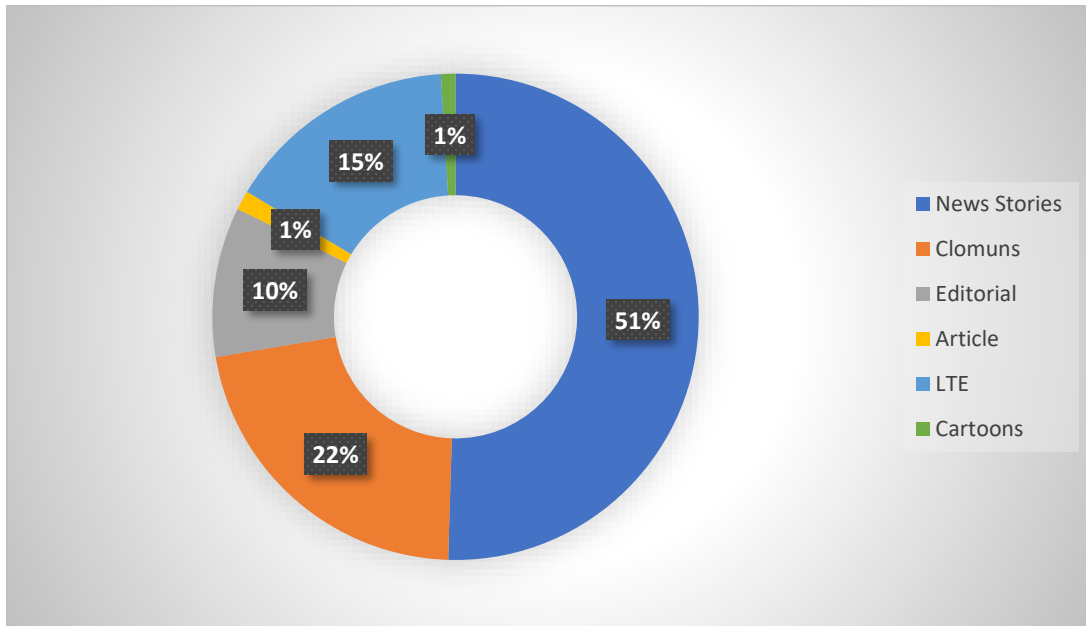
Our monitored database shows that a major chunk of the message spectrum consists of hard news. While soft news items are few and far between, breaking news, which usually ‘breaks’ hard news is a feature specific to electronic media. The 9 PM bulletins are considered prime time and are tools that generate high TRPs for the big news conglomerates. Thus, breaking news is seldom



broadcast during the bulletin. Instead the entire 9 PM bulletin has primarily become a set of flashy and noisy headlines. Hence all 206 electronic media news items fall into the category of hard news.

	<i>Print</i>	<i>Electronic</i>
Hard News	282	206
Soft News	29	0
Breaking News	0	0

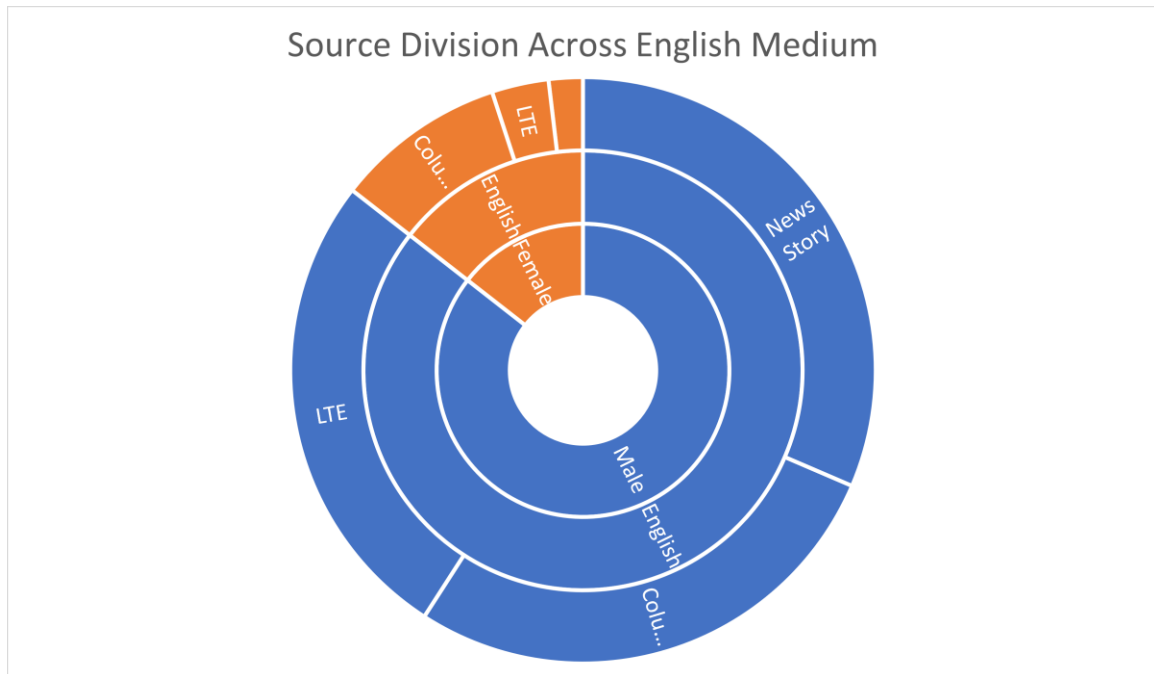
From the three newspapers the lion's share goes to news stories, followed by columns, editorials, articles, letter to editors and cartoons respectively.



Of the news stories, 24.2 % are from daily Mashriq (Urdu), 46.49 % and 29.29 % are from The News and Daily Dawn respectively.

➤ **Newspapers**

Regarding the division of sources vis-à-vis types of news items and types of mediums, Uks' organisational and content audits of media conglomerates show that newspapers do not have a balanced female to male ratio as sources of the news items. This is because decision-making positions (editorial boards) in media organisations lack female representation and exhibit a gender bias when assigning stories. The same trend can be seen in this exercise as only 6% news stories were sourced from women in English media.



The following table delineates the source division of types of news item across both media.

		Column	LTE	Article	Cartoon	News Story
English	Male	44	42	0	0	50
	Female	15	5	0	0	3
Urdu	Male	8	1	2	3	0
	Female	1	0	1	0	0

Bearing in mind that the majority of the news source for television are women, comparing that to the trends in newspaper source across medium lines, there is a clear illustration of how conventional news media works.

### ➤ Grading of Headlines

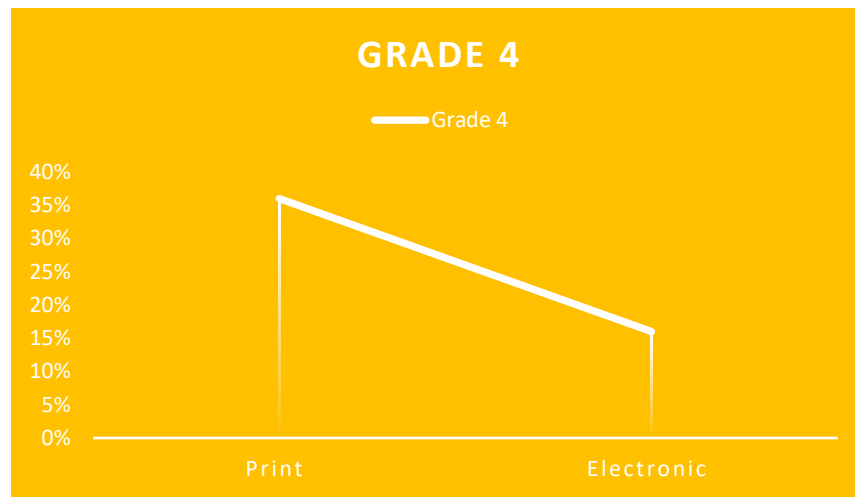
A total 517 news headlines in print and electronic media were graded by the media monitor, where the highest score was 4 and the lowest score was 1 (refer to section -----).

#### ○ Grade 4

Some 28.4 % of total news headlines regardless of their genre (hard, soft), type and medium (English, Urdu) were scored 4 marks. This means that 28.4% of the headlines floating in the news message system are pure constructive headlines, as they check all the four indicators which includes

- ✓ Nuances given in the headline
- ✓ Ethical sensitivities are considered
- ✓ Language is not dramatised and provocative
- ✓ Headlines are not bleeding

If seen disaggregated of Print and Electronic media, trends of headlines differ. A total of 36% of total news headlines from print media qualify for the highest rating headlines marking all the 4 checks, while only 16 % of electronic media headlines were marked as such. This drop from print to electronic media is reflected in the graph.



- **Grade 3**  
While 37%, of the total news headlines garnered 3 checks on all the 4 indicators exclusive of nuances, this percentage when seen disaggregated of print and electronic media remains 36% for print news headlines and increases to 37.7% for electronic media headlines.
- **Grade 2**  
A total of 17 % of news headlines are not gender sensitive, nor do they take into account other ethical sensitivities. While they do not display nuances, this percentage is much higher for television headlines than print media headlines when seen disaggregated, which is 23% to 13% respectively.
- **Grade 1**  
Some 18 % of news headlines used dramatised, flashy headlines to sensationalise stories while completely ignoring gender and other ethical considerations and nuances of the stories. Separately, this percentage is 14% for print media and 23% for electronic media.

*Score of Headlines (Score table)*

	Grade 4	Grade 3	Grade 2	Grade 1	Total (N)
Collective	147	191	88	91	517
Print	113	113	41	44	311
Electronic	34	78	47	47	206

➤ **Grading of News Story – Colour Card**

A linear scale of grading was created in the form of a colour card to grade the stories. The highest of this was purple and lowest was red. Media monitors were to read /listen [to] the whole story and pen down 3 elements of constructive journalism in them. The stories which had 3 elements i.e. Solution, Nuances, Democratic Dialogues (diversity & inclusivity) in them in their entirety were graded as purple. The stories which had any two elements were graded as yellow and so on (refer section 2)

○ **Purple**

Fifteen percent (15%) of the news stories out of the accumulated message system database qualify as the highest graded stories. This means that 15% of the news stories out there in the news message system are completely constructive and committed to societal well-being (both print and electronic). Seen disaggregated of the medium (print and electronic) this percentage breaks down as an abnormal proportion. Only 2.4% news items in their entirety are purely constructive in our electronic media message spectrum. While 23.2% of the news items are constructive in their entirety in the print media message system. Out of these 23.2%, the majority are news stories closely followed by columns. Very few editorials were found to be constructive in their entirety, which reflects the editorial directions of the big media giants. Another, stark difference between Urdu and English vernaculars is reflected, such that only 5% of the news items from Urdu print media could qualify for the highest grade.

○ **Yellow**

Some 14% of the news items qualified as the second highest rated constructive stories containing any two elements of constructive journalism in them. When seen disaggregated only 5.3% of television news items contained any two elements of constructive journalism while 19.3% of print media news items contained the same.

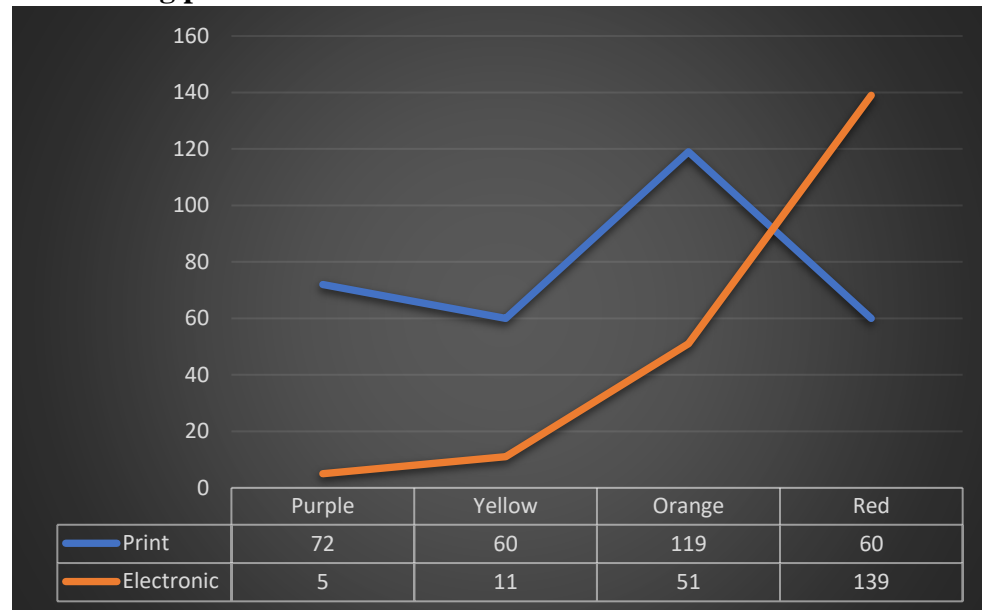
○ **Orange**

Some 33% of news items in our message system contain any one of the three elements (in most cases nuances) of constructive journalism in their entirety. Some 24.8% of television news items contain any one element of constructive journalism in them while 38.3% print news items do so.

- **Red**

At 38%, a shockingly high percentage of news items in our message system do not contain even a single element of constructive journalism in them. Some 68% of television news items are not constructive in their entirety while 19% of the print news items are not constructive in their entirety.

**Contrasting print with electronic media**



Out of our targeted message system, the television news message is more pervasive and far-reaching. Accordingly, it has more cultivation power among the its heavy and lower viewership. This wide-ranging media monitoring exercise has come up with a very clear pattern of how both medium of our message systems are currently working. Television news media is evidently far less constructive as compared to print media, where only 2.4% of the news items out of a total reportage spectrum, stand out as constructive journalistic stories in their entirety. On the other hand 68% of the news items being broadcast to a mass audience are hard, noisy, flashy and unethical in their entirety. This notion warrants a serious consideration of journalism practitioners in Pakistan as the concept of constructive journalism spread around the world.

## Section 4

### Qualitative Survey of Media Practitioners

As part of this research Uks sent a questionnaire to seasoned Pakistani journalists and academics to explore the viability of constructive journalism in the country. The results are telling and indicative of the hardcore training and conditioning of journalists to select, frame and tell stories with a negative bias. Uks was able to uncover a deep-seated belief amongst journalists that stories won't do well; or rather stories are not stories unless they have a negative bias with a sprinkling of sensationalism.

There was also an ingrained belief among the journalists that the Pakistani audience is only alert to negative information and sensationalism due to conditioning and the general conflict-ridden environment in the country. It could be argued that this conditioning is also an outcome of the expectations set by the media over the years. The respondents were by and large familiar with the term Constructive Journalism. All the journalists were working in leading media houses of the country and familiar with the environment in news rooms. Some of the respondents believed a solution-oriented focus on news was beyond the capabilities of the average reporter. One respondent did suggest capacity-building of reporters and newsroom staff however another seasoned journalist questioned whether journalists should be involved in suggesting solutions in the first place, unless they were quoting an expert.

Respondents also alluded to the sensationalist nature of the news which had set audience expectations and made 'offering' anything less than sensationalist a non-option when it came to news. 'I think it's (constructive journalism) an uphill task because TV journalism in particular is fed by sensationalism'.

At least two journalists pointed out that there was a danger that constructive journalism could be mistaken for 'positive' journalism. Both explained that the danger with this was that it could be used to either avoid or outright censor stories which were not 'positive.'

Another journalist expounded on the conflict-based nature of Pakistani society, concluding that 'negative stories were inevitable.

The overall attitude towards constructive journalism on the part of journalists was one of apprehension. One journalist summed up the apprehension when he said that 'If these institutions (that are criticized by the media) were unconsciously doing this (corruption), there would have been some scope to highlight the positive side in a bigger manner, and move towards what is being termed as 'constructive journalism'. But if most journalists and members of the civil society are convinced that most of the short-coming or failures are deliberate as the state institutions are not interested in development, or are involved in corruption, or are trying to promote authoritarian ideas and narrative, it's almost impossible to promote 'constructive' or 'positive' narrative. In fact, it may amount to buying into, or justifying, these actions.'

### **Ameliorating the News Practice in Pakistan: The Fluid Model**

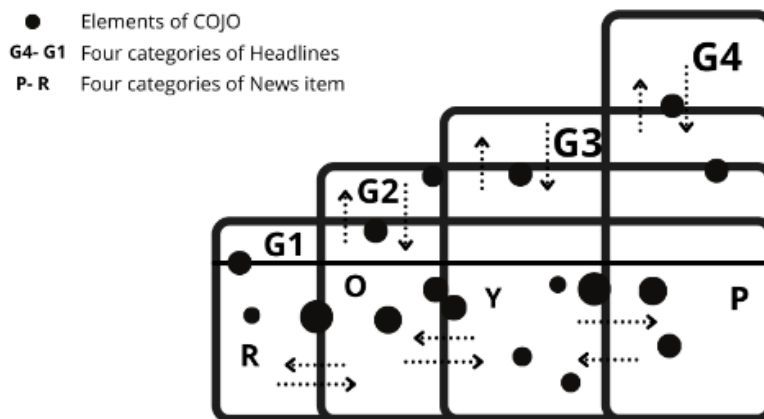
Communication which is a stream of cultural symbols and societal trends is immune to hard cut and paste models. It is not rational to take a drop out of that stream and subject it to rigorous analyses on its own as a detached entity. Factually intersectionality and ambiguity are what which make this continuum a thorough and comprehensive phenomenon. The news message system is a significant part of the overarching communication phenomena and cannot be considered in isolation. All elements cannot be copy pasted without cultural and societal consideration. Though our news message system is yearning for a more human centric approach, the process has to be gradual. During the process of grounding constructive journalism in Pakistan, Uks deconstructed the news media through content analysis, and also interviewed academics and practitioners from across the Pakistan. With increasing awareness about this approach, a significant level of suspicion has also been observed. Generally speaking, journalists see this approach as something which could be a potential threat to the status quo while academics see it as an attempt to soften the government – media relationship. Moreover, in a conflict-centered society like Pakistan is considered incongruous for the constructive journalism by local experts. One thing, which has emerged is that this approach cannot be as grounded in the local environment as it has been in Scandinavian countries. By categorising the news message system in 4 categories Uks has tried to find a ‘Pakistani’ way forward on the matter.

Uks’ research data has shed light on how Pakistan’s contemporary news message system is functioning. The data shared in this report shows that headlines in contrast with news bodies are more worked on and shaped mainly because it is the element of the news body that is most likely to catch more eyes as opposed to the news body. The low level of attention given to the news body can render a stereotypically driven news message system in its entirety. A major portion of the news spectrum is centered around the middle two categories, and stories have the tendency to either fluctuate towards a higher degree (more constructive) or plummet towards a lower degree. This makes news message system the fluid, and offers an opportunity to an advocate of constructive journalism. On the other hand, a black and white, rigid phenomenon is more reluctant to take on any influence. This flexibility and fluidity within have allowed us to furnish an augmentation model for amelioration of news message practices, which can help us understand, as well implement the elements of Constructive Journalism in production.

### The Fluid Model:

A continuously fluctuating news message system, in a liquid state is more prone to accept any penetration provided it is subtle. This liquid or fluid nature of news message systems continuously ameliorates and deteriorates news item and headlines upon subjection or exclusion of any of the elements of constructive journalism and ethical consideration. *Particularly, these elements of constructive journalism make a news message system fluid.*

## The Fluid Model



A journalist could maneuver these elements to rank his/ her story higher on this scale. As this is a gradual process inclusion and exclusion of the elements could vary as far as the goal remains to move towards constructive journalism. Proliferation of these elements in the news message system could render a more constructive system without direct confrontation with the existing organisational status quo.



## **Conclusion**

Sharply focused on the unfolding of dramatic events and seemingly unsolvable social problems, traditional journalism in Pakistan (like in the rest of the world) has often created a perception of the world that is depressing and distorted. Over the years audiences have been programmed to tune into stories that carry a negative bias, so much so that many believe that nothing less than the sensational, the disastrous and the depressing will satiate them anymore.

With the emergence of mental health as an important aspect of overall well-being, the role of the media – widely blamed for spreading a negative and skewed view of the world – has come under focus. The pandemic has also thrown a spotlight on the power of the media on the one hand to help enforce effective lockdowns, but on the other to induce debilitating bouts of anxiety and fear. This as many sat in the relative safety of their homes. Frequent information updates received 24/7 during the pandemic added to the stress and the associated fear mongering.

This study sought to gauge the incidence of constructive journalism in Pakistan and its awareness amongst stakeholders, namely journalists. It broadly concludes that constructive journalism is at a nascent stage at the time this study was conducted. The findings indicate that there exists a large audience for the kind of stories with a negative bias that are currently being published and broadcast through traditional media. It also indicates that there is a definite need for an attitudinal study of the Pakistani audience/readership's behaviour towards the pervasive doom gloom found in the average news story.

The qualitative survey of journalists and academics which was also a part of this study displays a general reluctance to adopt constructive journalism as a domain and also indicates a propensity to maintain the status quo in the field. The sense that constructive journalism may not be 'serious' journalism is also palpable from the responses to our questionnaire.

In a developing country where key social indicators are generally grim, low or negative, a lot needs to change in the average man's life. The surveyed journalists believe that by highlighting society's ills they are playing an instrumental role in moving the country onto the path of development, hence the overall unwillingness to embrace constructive journalism as a dominant domain.

While solution-focused journalism will present a more accurate reflection of the world, an attitudinal study that gauges audience-readiness for constructive journalism will present a clearer picture of the status of this new emerging form of journalism in Pakistan.

