

Credibility under Pressure: New Media Content Diversity and Journalistic Values in Pakistan

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Abstract

As new media platforms multiply the volume and variety of content journalists must process, core journalistic values — credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability — come under sustained pressure to keep pace. This study examined whether that pressure is best explained by the number of platforms journalists use or by the diversity of sources and content they draw on, testing platform diversity, source diversity and content diversity as separate predictors of journalistic values among Pakistani journalists. Using a positivist, quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected through an online questionnaire administered to journalists registered with a National Press Club in Pakistan (N = 300; complete-case N = 262 for inferential analyses). Pearson correlation and simple linear regression showed that platform-level new media diversity had only a weak, though statistically significant, positive relationship with journalistic values ($r = .17$, $p = .006$, $r^2 = .029$), whereas source diversity ($r = .73$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .529$) and, especially, content diversity ($r = .86$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .741$) were strong, highly significant predictors — the single largest effect observed in the parent study. The findings show that credibility comes under pressure primarily from the range of content journalists engage with, not from platform use itself, pointing to content verification — not platform restriction — as the more urgent safeguard for journalistic values in Pakistan.

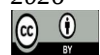
Keywords: New media diversity; source diversity; content diversity; journalistic values; credibility; accountability; Pakistan

Introduction

New media has supplanted much of traditional media's role in Pakistani journalism, raising the question of whether the values that define journalism as a profession — credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability — survive that transition intact. As journalists increasingly rely on diverse platforms, sources and content for newsgathering, engagement with material of uncertain provenance has become routine, and with it the risk that fact-checking, verification and editorial independence are compromised under time and audience pressure (Bastian et al., 2021).

This article isolates the values dimension from a wider doctoral study of new media diversity and journalistic professionalism, asking specifically how platform diversity, source diversity and

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content diversity relate to journalists' perceived ability to maintain credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability while working in a diversified new media environment.

Problem Statement

The widespread use of new media platforms for acquiring content from diverse and often unverified sources has complicated the maintenance of core journalistic values. This study examines the influence of journalists' engagement with diverse new media — platform, source and content — on the values of credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability in the Pakistani press.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess journalists' proficiency in upholding journalistic values while using diverse new media for information dissemination in Pakistan.
2. To examine the influence of new media source diversity on journalistic values.
3. To examine the influence of new media content diversity on journalistic values.
4. To compare the relative contribution of platform, source and content diversity to journalists' perceived maintenance of professional values.

Significance of the Study

Journalistic values are frequently theorized (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Schudson & Anderson, 2009) but rarely decomposed against the specific facets of new media diversity that may be driving change in them. By testing platform, source and content diversity separately against credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability, this article offers Pakistani media organizations and journalism educators concrete evidence on which aspect of the new media environment most urgently needs value-focused training and editorial safeguards.

Literature Review

Journalistic values — credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability, as examined here — are widely treated in the literature as the ethical core that differentiates journalism from other information-producing activities (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Schudson & Anderson, 2009; Vos, 2005). Bastian et al. (2021) found that algorithmic personalization systems, while potentially delivering more relevant news, can narrow the diversity of perspectives users encounter and create tension around editorial autonomy, transparency, fairness and user agency — concerns voiced directly by journalists and technologists they interviewed at two European newspapers.

Banjac and Hanusch (2020) found that audiences still associate professional journalism with objectivity, factual accuracy, research rigor and public-interest service, even as the boundary between journalists and other content producers blurs — audiences continued to judge credibility and legitimacy by quality, transparency and authenticity regardless of platform. Lasorsa et al. (2012) identified specific behavioral indicators of accountability and transparency in journalists' social media use — linking, personalization, job-talking and engaging in discussion — while Hermida (2010) described the resulting 'ambient journalism' environment as one in which continuous, real-time information flow makes sustained fact-checking structurally harder to maintain.

Wardle et al. (2014) documented how reliance on user-generated content, sourced from highly diverse and often unverifiable origins, has forced news organizations to develop new verification workflows to protect accuracy standards. Taken together, this literature motivates testing whether it is the number of platforms used, or the diversity of sources and content drawn upon, that is the operative pressure on journalistic values — a question this study answers directly in the Pakistani context.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

New media diversity is modeled as comprising platform diversity (New Media Diversity), source diversity and content diversity, each hypothesized to predict journalists' perceived maintenance of journalistic values (credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability).

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between new media (platform) diversity and journalistic values.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between new media source diversity and journalistic values.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between new media content diversity and journalistic values.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do journalists perceive their ability to maintain predefined journalistic values while exposed to new media diversity?

RQ2: How does new media source diversity relate to journalists' maintenance of journalistic values in Pakistan?

RQ3: How does new media content diversity relate to journalists' maintenance of journalistic values in Pakistan?

Methodology

This study adopted a positivist, quantitative and correlational research design within Saunders et al.'s (2019) 'research onion' framework, using a deductive approach that moved from the general construct of new media diversity to its specific effect on journalists' professional practice (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Dudovskiy, 2022; Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Data were collected using a cross-sectional, self-administered online survey.

Population and Sample

The population comprised the journalist community of Pakistan, both print and electronic. The sampling frame was journalists registered with press clubs and professional bodies (a combined membership of approximately 19,000). Using non-random, convenience sampling, an online questionnaire link was distributed to journalists registered with a National Press Club and working in media organizations across Pakistan. Of 502 exported responses, 300 records were correct-

ly aligned with the questionnaire's column structure after data screening and were retained for analysis (N = 300).

Instrument and Reliability

The same structured questionnaire described for the parent study (85 final items across demographics, new media usage patterns and composite study variables) was used. Composite reliability for the variables relevant to this article was as follows.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for the Study Variables

Variable	Items (k)	N	Cronbach's α
New Media Diversity	8	300	0.832
Source Diversity	7	254	0.927
Content Diversity	7	260	0.951
Journalistic Values	11	240	0.962

Note. All coefficients exceed the .70 threshold recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Data Analysis

Composite variable scores (means of all valid items, rescaled to a 1-5 metric) were tested for normality; skewness and kurtosis values fell within the range conventionally accepted as consistent with approximately normal distributions. Pearson product-moment correlation and simple linear regression were therefore used to test the study's hypotheses, computed on the complete-case sample (N = 262).

Results

Sample Profile

The sample was predominantly male (88.7%) and early-career: 76.6% were aged 18-33, half (50.3%) held a master's degree as their highest qualification, and 84.3% reported 1-5 years of professional experience. Respondents were drawn from digital/social media desks (35.3%), television (32.7%), other outlets (26.3%), wire services (4.0%) and radio (1.7%).

Correlational Findings

To identify precisely where credibility comes under pressure, Pearson correlations were computed on the complete-case sample (N = 262, df = 260) separately for each facet of new media diversity against Journalistic Values. Platform-level New Media Diversity showed only a low, though statistically significant, positive correlation with Journalistic Values, $r = .17$, $p = .006$ — a weak pressure at best. Source Diversity ($r = .73$, $p < .001$) and, most strongly, Content Diversity ($r = .86$, $p < .001$) both correlated strongly with Journalistic Values, identifying content exposure as the dominant source of pressure on credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability. Source and Content Diversity were themselves strongly intercorrelated ($r = .78$, $p < .001$).

Table 2: Pearson Correlations Among New Media Diversity Variables and Journalistic Values (N = 262)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. New Media Diversity	—	0.18**	0.21***	0.17**
2. Source Diversity		—	0.78***	0.73***
3. Content Diversity			—	0.86***
4. Journalistic Values				—

Note. N = 262 (complete-case sample). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Regression Findings

New Media Diversity positively and significantly predicted Journalistic Values, $\beta = .17$, $t(260) = 2.78$, $p = .006$, explaining 2.9% of the variance ($r^2 = .029$), $F(1, 260) = 7.76$, $p = .006$ — a real but minor pressure on credibility. H1 is supported, though the explanatory power is limited.

Table 3: Regression Summary for New Media Diversity Predicting Journalistic Values

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.
New Media Diversity	0.219	0.079	0.170	2.78	= .006

Note. Dependent variable: Journalistic Values. $n = 262$, $r^2 = .029$, adjusted $r^2 = .025$, $F(1, 260) = 7.76$.

Source Diversity positively and significantly predicted Journalistic Values, $\beta = .73$, $t(260) = 17.07$, $p < .001$, explaining 52.9% of the variance ($r^2 = .529$), $F(1, 260) = 291.47$, $p < .001$ — a strong source of pressure on how values are maintained. H2 is supported.

Table 4: Regression Summary for Source Diversity Predicting Journalistic Values

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.
Source Diversity	0.728	0.043	0.727	17.07	< .001

Note. Dependent variable: Journalistic Values. $n = 262$, $r^2 = .529$, adjusted $r^2 = .527$, $F(1, 260) = 291.47$.

Content Diversity positively and significantly predicted Journalistic Values, $\beta = .86$, $t(260) = 27.25$, $p < .001$, explaining 74.1% of the variance ($r^2 = .741$), $F(1, 260) = 742.64$, $p < .001$ — the single largest source of pressure on journalistic values observed in the parent study. H3 is supported.

Table 5: Regression Summary for Content Diversity Predicting Journalistic Values

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.
Content Diversity	0.809	0.030	0.861	27.25	< .001

Note. Dependent variable: Journalistic Values. $n = 262$, $r^2 = .741$, adjusted $r^2 = .740$, $F(1, 260) = 742.64$.

Discussion

Respondents reported that the spread of fake news on social media platforms significantly undermines the credibility of news and causes public confusion; that ratings pressure compromises the transparency of news coverage; and that close adherence to editorial guidelines under time pressure to publish quickly increases workload while sometimes reducing the depth — and by extension the accuracy — of news content. These accounts are consistent with Bastian et al.'s (2021) finding that algorithmic and platform pressures create real tension around editorial autonomy and transparency, and with Hermida's (2010) account of ambient journalism's structural pressure on sustained verification.

Statistically, platform-level New Media Diversity was only a weak predictor of Journalistic Values ($r = .17$, $r^2 = .029$) compared to Source Diversity ($r = .73$, $r^2 = .529$) and, especially, Content Diversity ($r = .86$, $r^2 = .741$) — the strongest relationship identified anywhere in the parent study. This indicates that maintaining credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability is driven far more by the range of content journalists engage with than by how many platforms they use. This is consistent with Banjac and Hanusch's (2020) finding that audiences judge credibility by the quality and authenticity of content rather than by platform, and reinforces Wardle et al.'s (2014) point that verification challenges scale with the diversity of content sourced, not with platform count.

The comparatively small effect of platform-level diversity suggests that simply reducing the number of platforms journalists use is unlikely to protect journalistic values; the far larger effects of source and content diversity point instead toward verification training and editorial safeguards targeted at how diverse content is vetted before publication.

Conclusion

Journalistic values in Pakistan are being reshaped primarily by the diversity of sources and, above all, the diversity of content journalists engage with through new media — not by the number of platforms in use. Content diversity alone explained 74.1% of the variance in journalists' perceived maintenance of credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability, the single largest effect found in the wider study of new media diversity and journalistic professionalism. While platform-level diversity showed a statistically significant relationship with journalistic values, its explanatory power was minimal by comparison. Efforts to protect journalistic values in an increasingly diversified new media environment should therefore focus on strengthening content verification and source-vetting practices rather than on limiting platform adoption.

Limitations

As with the parent study, convenience sampling of journalists registered with a National Press Club and geographically concentrated in a limited number of urban centres limits generalizability to journalists across all regions of Pakistan. The cross-sectional design does not permit causal claims about whether content diversity drives changes in values or whether journalists who already hold strong values selectively seek out more diverse content. Self-reported perceptions of value maintenance, rather than independently coded content analysis, is a further limitation.

Practical and Policy Implications

Newsroom policy should prioritize verification protocols and editorial training focused specifically on content diversity — the strongest lever identified here — over blanket restrictions on platform use. Press clubs, regulatory bodies and journalism schools in Pakistan could use these findings to design values-specific curricula addressing credibility, autonomy, accuracy and accountability as distinct competencies, each potentially requiring different safeguards given their common but not identical dependence on source and content diversity. Future research should test whether these relationships hold with probability sampling across Pakistan's provinces and examine each journalistic value as a separate outcome variable.

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