

ROLE OF PAKISTANI MEDIA IN MITIGATING DISASTER

Dr. Anjum Zia*, Hira Nadeem** & Dr. Faiza Abid***

Abstract

When natural disaster strikes, mass media have the ability to gather information and disseminate verified information quickly. In the case of Pakistan, destruction from predictable and semi-predictable disasters can be mitigated if awareness is timely spread to improve preventive, precautionary and rehabilitative measures. The present qualitative study explores the role of Pakistani media in disaster mitigation. The data was collected through in-depth interviews of experienced government officials and journalists. The results suggest that the role of media in disaster mitigation has not been significant during preparedness phase of natural disasters, whereas media coverage was quite appreciable during response and recovery phases. However, improvement is still needed w.r.t. media's role in resource management, providing early warning and panic management. Media coverage can also increase political involvement by making leaders more responsive. There is a need to train media personnel to improve their capacity for understanding key disaster terms and the scope of the hazard.

Keywords: *Media's Role, Disaster Mitigation, Pakistan, Natural Disasters, Awareness, Training*

Introduction

Asia is the continent where disasters occur very frequently. There is no country in Asia that is immune from disasters, though vulnerability to disasters varies. Be it natural disasters,

* Dr. Anjum Zia, Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication Lahore Women College University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: anjumzia86@yahoo.com.

** Hira Nadeem, M.Phil in Mass Communication management Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email : hiranadeem_28@hotmail.com.

*** Dr. Faiza Abid Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication Lahore Women College University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email:faizaabid@hotmail.com.

environmental emergencies, man-made disasters, or pandemic emergencies, all can seriously affect the health as well as socio-economic conditions of countries and communities. Research shows that more than 95 per-cent of total deaths caused by disasters take place in the developing nations. Similarly, natural disasters cause twenty times more damages in developing states in contrast to the industrialized states.¹

Pakistan is exposed to almost all kinds of disasters. Overall, a significant increase in the number of disasters has been reported in the last few decades. These increasing numbers of disasters have continued to expose millions of people to suffering and poverty in Pakistan. The continuing war against terrorism in the region, internal conflicts, as well as climate change have affected the climate, thus leading to droughts, floods and other disasters almost every year which affect the large populations residing in the affected areas.²

Human beings have a nearly zero control over the outbreak of natural disasters, therefore, disaster management efforts mainly emphasize on impact mitigation in order to alleviate the sufferings caused by them.³ Mass media in today's world has a critical role to play in disaster mitigations efforts because of its ability to influence public attitudes, which in turn can influence legislative actions.⁴ Further, ICT (Information and Communications Technology) serves a valuable early warning tool to alert the potential affectees of a natural disaster. Although, the use of internet can be affected in some areas, yet the ones connected can be accessed to disseminate information.⁵

Pakistani media has seen a quantum progress in the last decade. Today, it has the power to play a vital role in almost every sphere of life. It has the power to influence people; one of the main aims of mass media is to enlighten people and create awareness by sharing information. Although Pakistani media has come under fire for its irresponsible

¹ Nobhojit Roy, Purvi Thakkar, and Hemant Shah, "Developing-World Disaster Research: Present Evidence and Future Priorities," *Disaster Med Public Health Prep* 5, no. 2 (June 2011): 112-16.

² Lubna Rafiq and Thomas Blaschke, "Disaster Risk and Vulnerability in Pakistan at a District Level," *Geomatics Natural Hazards and Risk* 3, no. 4 (2012): 324-41.

³ Deirdre T. Guion, Debra L. Scammon, and Aberdeen Leila Borders, "Weathering the Storm: A Social Marketing Perspective on Disaster Preparedness and Response with Lessons from Hurricane Katrina," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 20-32.

⁴ Adeline Levine, *Love Canal: Science, Politics, and People* (University of Michigan, Lexington Books, 1982).

⁵ Munib ur Rahman et al., "Implementation of ICT and Wireless Sensor Networks for Earthquake Alert and Disaster Management in Earthquake Prone Areas," *Procedia Computer Science* 85 (January 1, 2016): 92-99.

reporting, lack of objectivity, sensationalism and political contamination of the content, yet the role of media cannot be underestimated. Role of the media 'becomes crucial when it reports a disaster state'.⁶ Research has also shown that 'traditionally, during crisis communication, media of news serve as mediator between the public at large and emergency managers. In general, television, radio and print messages travel a long distance and reach a large audience'.⁷

In the past, Pakistani media has played quite an appreciable role in disaster management by motivating the nation to stand united during times of crisis, but it can do a lot more.⁸ There is a need for greater media involvement in disaster mitigation. The Pakistani media needs to specifically focus on resource management, providing early warnings and panic management. It can also increase political involvement in order to make leaders more responsive and can trigger donations from the international community. Information conveyed in an effective manner can contribute in mitigating disaster or in damage control.⁹ Disaster mitigation involves pre-disaster preparation as well as post-disaster response, rescue and rehabilitation efforts with government in the lead role. The role of government includes but is not limited to agenda setting, involving major stakeholders in planning, but also legislation and rules implementation. Media can play a responsible and significant role in mitigation phase by helping out the governments in performing the roles narrated above.

Scholars opine that media plays a leading role in changing the mind-set of society, making it more proactive rather than reactive. Another responsibility of media is to construct credible and valuable messages for the public. Sensational news can reinforce panic, fear, and chaos that may cause greater losses.¹⁰ Moreover, disaster-warning systems do not work independently; mass media has the ability to gather information from various sources and report it to the public after

⁶ Emily Ying Yang Chan, *Public Health Humanitarian Responses to Natural Disasters* (Routledge, 2017).

⁷ Mark Latonero and Irina Shklovski, "Emergency Management, Twitter, and Social Media Evangelism," *International Journal of Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management* 3, no. 4 (2011): 5.

⁸ Muzammil Zaidi, "Poor Disaster Management," *Dawn*, April 23, 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/712713/poor-disaster-management>.

⁹ Enrico L. Quarantelli, "Implications for Programmes and Policies from Future Disaster Trends," *Risk Management* 1, no. 1 (1999): 9–19.

¹⁰ Sulman Khalid, "The Role of Media in Disaster Management," *Pakistan Press Foundation*, December 16, 2013, <https://www.pakistanpressfoundation.org/the-role-of-media-in-disaster-management/>.

verification.¹¹ Thus, media has to be more proactive about disaster coverage. There is also a need to train media persons, which will enhance their understanding of key disaster terms and the scope of the effects of a disaster.

The rationale of this study is to analyze the role and importance of media in mitigating disasters. This article contributes towards understanding the possible nexus between media, public awareness and disaster mitigation, and how can this nexus be put to effective use by disaster management authorities. It also tries to establish whether media plays a proactive or reactive role in mitigating disasters, through investigating if media personnel are trained in disaster reporting or not.

Previous studies have established that media plays a significant role in the development and progress of society. The advent of the century witnessed a flux in electronic media including television and FM channels in Pakistan. These channels can reach the public at large and cover almost every part of the country. Today, electronic media is playing a significant role in opinion formation. Media is also establishing an early warning system in far-flung, disaster prone areas.¹² FM radio channels also play a role in providing information and educating the public because they have access to remote areas. Positive media contribution can develop a more healthy community having adequate awareness and preparedness about mitigation of disasters.

Providing early warning to alert communities at risk for taking precautionary measures is an essential function that media can perform in the pre-disaster phase. This requires providing information and encouraging people's active participation.¹³ The intelligent role of media can increase the efficiency of disaster and crisis communication by manifolds and thorough training of media personnel for disaster and crisis communication with the masses serves as an essential prerequisite.¹⁴ The impact of media on disaster risk perception at the end of both public and the government is also very crucial.¹⁵

During an ongoing disaster, media works as a double-edged sword that can have both negative and positive outcomes. On one side, curtailing

¹¹ Havidan Rodriguez, Enrico L. Quarantelli, and Russell R. Dynes, *Handbook of Disaster Research* (Springer, 2007).

¹² Lubna Zaheer, "Natural Catastrophes and Role of Pakistani Mass Media," *Journal of Political Studies* 23, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 207–232.

¹³ Sulman Khalid, "The Role of Media in Disaster Management."

¹⁴ David Plance, "Breaking News: The Role of the Media in Disasters," (Master's Thesis, Charles Town, West Virginia: American Public University System, 2012), 7.

¹⁵ Peter Vasterman, C. Joris Yzermans, and Anja J. E. Dirkzwager, "The Role of the Media and Media Hypes in the Aftermath of Disasters," *Epidemiologic Reviews* 27, no. 1 (July 2005): 107–14.

the spread of misinformation and anti-social agendas is an important part of disaster mitigation efforts as it can have adverse effects on the efficacy of public information and warning systems. On the other hand, a good synergy between disaster managers and media broadcasting centers can enhance effective communication of required messages that promote safety of public and response partners.¹⁶

Many studies on the role of media in disaster response suggest the usage of multiple media types with a special emphasis on social media for communication between the government/responding organizations and the public (e.g, Dethridge & Quinn¹⁷; Fry and Binner¹⁸; Song & Yan¹⁹). This study differs from them in terms of its focus and design. Researched discussing media's role in the mitigation phase is hardly available in the existing body of literature. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the role of Pakistani media in mitigating disasters with special reference to its proactive or reactive role.

Disasters in Pakistan

The word disaster has French origin, which means a bad omen, a cursed star, or a dangerous situation. According to World Health Organization, "a disaster is an occurrence disrupting the normal conditions of existence and causing a level of suffering that exceeds the capacity of adjustment of the affected community".²⁰ Pakistan faces mainly two types of disasters including natural and human induced disasters. Natural disasters are caused by natural events or natural phenomena i.e. earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, avalanches, landslides, cyclones, droughts, river erosions etc. Whereas human induced disasters are caused by human activities, mistakes, actions or experiments; for instance transport accidents, terrorism, oil spills, urban fires, civil conflicts, Chemical Nuclear Radiological (CNR) accidents etc.²¹

¹⁶ David Plance, "Breaking News: The Role of the Media in Disasters," 8.

¹⁷ Lisa Dethridge and Brian Quinn, "Realtime Emergency Communication in Virtual Worlds," *International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment* 7, no. 1 (February 2016): 26-39.

¹⁸ John Fry and Jane M. Binner, "Elementary Modelling and Behavioural Analysis for Emergency Evacuations Using Social Media," *European Journal of Operational Research* 249, no. 3 (March 16, 2016): 1014-23.

¹⁹ Xiaolong Song and Xiangbin Yan, "Influencing Factors of Emergency Information Spreading in Online Social Networks: A Simulation Approach," *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 9, no. 1 (2012).

²⁰ World Health Organization, "Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence against Women," (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2001).

²¹ Sayeeda Amber Sayed and Pedro Arcos González, "Flood Disaster Profile of Pakistan: A Review," *Science Journal of Public Health* 2, no. 3 (2014): 144-49.

Disasters mostly come without early warnings but floods and droughts take gradual course and do not cause rapid destruction. The damage caused can be prevented or reduced if proper measures are taken in advance. If the institutions are strengthened and communication media are used properly for this purpose, it can create a difference. Pakistan stands fourth in the world rankings of disaster prone regions, where 11,872,500 people are living in vulnerable areas. Earthquakes, floods, landslides, droughts, cyclones and avalanches are the natural disasters that repeatedly affect Pakistan.²²

Pakistan has been facing disasters since its inception and has experienced massive destruction at the hands of both natural and man-made disasters throughout history. From the year 2000 till date, Pakistan has faced 97 major and minor catastrophes with 83,073 dead, 52,975,809 affected and a total loss of around US \$ 25,752,648, according to Emergency Event Database.²³

Out of these 97 natural disasters, 50 were floods which proves that these are permanent source of threat to lives, materials, resources and infrastructure. Floods and droughts have become a regular part of our national life.²⁴ Out of all climatic disasters, floods have been striking the country almost every year. Floods and droughts are traceable, which makes them predictable. Out of all the natural hazards that Pakistan has faced in 21st century, the deadliest predictable disasters were the floods in 2010 and the Thar drought in 2014. These catastrophes are distinct in terms of the damage they caused and lives they affected.

Disaster management in Pakistan has largely remained disappointing. Factors responsible for its unsatisfactory function include lack of resources as well as lack of proactive approach and transparency.²⁵ Pakistani media has played a pivotal role in attracting attention of the community at large towards these disasters that destroyed infrastructure and uprooted millions of people. As a response, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) were established to make coordinated efforts for overcoming such crises.

Communication is the key to success in all phases of disaster

²² Shahid Ahmad et al., "Drought Mitigation in Pakistan: Current Status and Options for Future Strategies," IWMI Working Paper 85 (International Water Management Institute, 2004).

²³ Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), "The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database," (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), 2010).

²⁴ Pradeep Nair, "Role of Media in Disaster Management," *Mass Communicator* 4, no. 1 (2010): 36-40.

²⁵ Irshad Ali Sodhar, "Disaster Management in Pakistan," *Jahangir World Times Blog*, 2011.

management, be it mitigation, preparedness, response or recovery.²⁶ Role of media cannot be ignored in any of the phases as almost 25 percent of all news stories in media are connected to crises, disasters and hazards.²⁷ In one way or the other, media is the fourth pillar of the state. It acts as a communication link between victims, donors, survivors and the public; media is a central force that binds the outer world with the center of disaster.²⁸ Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah rightly pointed that, "the Press is great power and it can do good as well as harm. If rightly conducted, it can guide and instruct public opinion."²⁹

According to Pakistan Disaster Knowledge Network (PDKN), media can play a positive role by disseminating warnings, providing information to communities, creating awareness about precautionary measures to be taken to avoid damage, influencing decision-makers and bridging any communication gap. Knowing the information dissemination systems of different media and having an efficient information dissemination plan for disaster pre-warning plays a very important role in reducing losses and ensuring the safety of human beings.³⁰ Media plays a vital role in disaster management by educating the people about disasters through enabling discussions about disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Media can communicate information to the people and concerned authorities in order to prevent damage and minimize losses. Information regarding prevention and early warning can help in mitigation of disasters.

Disasters can strike any region at any time. Disaster management includes all steps that are taken to prevent or reduce damage caused along with providing relief and rehabilitation. Government institutions as well as other organizations can provide assistance in disaster management. Some of the humanitarian agencies and public sector departments are persistently providing relevant information to stakeholders but there is a chance of biasness that may mislead and therefore disrupt the whole

²⁶ Anam Muzamill, "A Comparative Study of Natural Disasters News Coverage in Pakistan by Dawn & the News (The Case of Earthquake 2005, & Floods 2010)," (International Conference on Communication, Media, Technology and Design, Istanbul, Turkey: 2012), 1-5.

²⁷ Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (Northwestern University Press, 2004).

²⁸ Simon Cottle, "Rethinking Media and Disasters in a Global Age: What's Changed and Why It Matters," *Media, War & Conflict* 7, no. 1 (2014): 3-22.

²⁹ Quaid-e azam, "Quotes," Pakistan, http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/Quaid/quotes_page3.html

³⁰ Nan Zhang et al., "Dynamic 8-State ICSAR Rumor Propagation Model Considering Official Rumor Refutation," *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications* 415 (December 1, 2014): 333-346.

process. Pakistan has a weak disaster management system;³¹ therefore, the role of media in disaster management has gained much importance. Electronic and print media disaster reporting provide required information at different stages for better preparedness and timely response. They also empower hazard-prone communities to hold private and public organizations accountable.

Methodology

This qualitative research has used both primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data was collected through literature review based on media content and practitioners' experiences. Primary data was gathered by conducting in-depth unstructured interviews with sources having experience related to disaster management and media.³² In-depth interviews are appropriate for acquiring deeper knowledge about the subject under study.³³ The respondents belonged to top or mid-level hierarchy of the disaster-managing authorities or media organizations.

Findings and Analysis

Findings are presented below on the basis of themes selected while interviewing the respondents.

Importance of media in disaster management

On this theme, majority of the respondents said that media has a significant role in our lives as people take aspirations from it. All the respondents agreed upon the importance and significant role of media in creating awareness about social and current issues. Media plays a critical role in social reform of a country; without its support no task can be accomplished in this age.³⁴ Therefore, it has importance in spreading public awareness regarding predictable disasters as the damage caused by them can be mitigated. Mass media can play an important role both before and after the disaster. Mass media have some definite characteristics that make them beneficial for disaster communication.³⁵

³¹ Sayeeda Amber Sayed and Pedro Arcos González, "Flood Disaster Profile of Pakistan: A Review."

³² Robert G. Burgess, "The Unstructured Interview as a Conversation," in *Field Research* (Routledge, 2003), 107–10, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203379998-25>.

³³ Lubna Zaheer, "Print Media Coverage of Natural Disasters and Its Impact on Disaster Management in Pakistan (The Case of Earthquake 2005, Flood 2010 and Famine 2014)," (PhD Thesis, Lahore, University of the Punjab, 2015).

³⁴ Ali Zarqa, "Media Myths and Realities in Natural Disasters," *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2013): 125–33.

³⁵ Pradeep Nair, "Role of Media in Disaster Management."

However, one of the respondents Syed Eusaf Viqar, Deputy Director, Response, National Disaster Management Authority (NIDM) stated that 'although media has a role in spreading awareness but for media, mostly, bad news is news'. He further said that 'basically media's role is to sensitize about issues like disaster management but this role hasn't been played effectively'.³⁶ Similarly, another respondent Brig (R) Sajid Naeem, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) said that, 'Media covers disaster when news value develops after an event occurs not before that for awareness. Media doesn't give solutions to the problems. The change doesn't come overnight. Just by briefly highlighting an issue, it cannot be solved'.³⁷

Majority of the respondents agreed that 'media coverage revolves around efforts by the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and government officials. Media does not have a role in policy formation but an important role in advocacy and should be responsible for removing the misconceptions that exist about disasters.' The respondents also informed that 'PEMRA and public service law have announced the policies under which disaster management authorities and media houses are bound to broadcast/print public service messages but most of our private media hardly follows it.'

In the view of interviewee, Brig. Sajid Naeem, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, NIDM, there are two phases of disaster management: pre- and post- disaster management, in both of which print and electronic media is used. He explained, 'Pre is preparatory phase and post is called response phase. Preparatory phase starts from risk assessment i.e. to assess that what type of issues are being faced by the vulnerable community.' He further said that these issues have to be highlighted by the media.³⁸ Majority of the respondents stated that 'media's role is positive in terms of highlighting the issue but in order to take the credit of breaking news, it creates panic or frustration among the general public during the disaster. During an ongoing disaster, accurate information is more important than timely information'. The respondents pointed out, 'Media should follow the standpoint and perspective of the disaster management authority.'

Findings show that National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) and Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) have developed a

³⁶ Syed E. Viqar, (Deputy Director Response, National Disaster Management Authority (NIDM)) in discussion with Hira Nadeem, Prime Minister House, NDMA office, Islamabad, July 26, 2017.

³⁷ Brig. Sajid Naeem, (Senior Capacity Building Specialist, (National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM)), in discussion with Hira Nadeem, NIDM, Islamabad, July 30, 2017.

³⁸ Ibid.

system to communicate/use media for pre and post disaster phases. But, unfortunately, media is not sensitized to play an effective role during the pre-disaster phases. The information or warnings are shared with the masses after the news value develops depending on the policy of the organization. A study by Zubair Ahmed concludes that a strong political commitment is required to mitigate the disasters in Pakistan. His research considers the socio-political situation of Pakistan where the legislature, the judiciary and the executive are pillars of government, while the establishment, civil society (including international organizations) and media are the undeclared pillars of government.³⁹

Media and Disaster Management in Pakistan

Regarding the nexus between media and disaster management in Pakistan, Deputy Director Media, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Syed Eusaf Viqar said, 'NDMA established a media cell in 2014 with a proper team that monitors media coverage. District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) and Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) all are connected with media focal persons along with NDMA. Under the 18th Amendment, disaster management was devolved to the provinces with the centre having a coordinating role. In the event of a disaster, DDMAs have to respond first, then it would be PDMA's turn to respond and finally NDMA gets involved.⁴⁰

A respondent from media, Dr. Waqar Chaudhary, Resident Editor Pakistan Observer Lahore, Former Regional Director, Associated Press of Pakistan added that 'there is no proper coordination between media and PDMA. Media coordinates with disaster management authorities only during an emergency or if NDMA arranges any meeting and shares information about any danger or precaution. The partnership of disaster management authority with the media is very important and needs to be improved'.⁴¹ The media representative including P. J. Mir, Group president, Din News and Media Group Lahore suggested that "PDMA should provide figures and statistics regularly during disasters regarding damage and casualties and stay in touch with the media." He further said that "media can criticize people and government on various points to control disasters such as construction of dams and reservoirs, etc. as a social cause but they

³⁹ Zubair Ahmed, "Disaster Risks and Disaster Management Policies and Practices in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis of Disaster Management Act 2010 of Pakistan," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 4 (June 1, 2013): 15–20.

⁴⁰ Syed E. Viqar, (Deputy Director Response, National Disaster Management Authority (NIDM)) in discussion with Hira Nadeem, Prime Minister House, NDMA office, Islamabad, July 26, 2017.

⁴¹ Waqar Chaudhary, (Resident Editor Pakistan Observer Lahore), in discussion with Hira Nadeem, Daily Pakistan Observer, Lahore, November 14, 2017.

primarily focus on earning money.”⁴² Dr. Waqar Chaudhary also mentioned that “media sells news information as a commodity and also safeguards its own political agendas”.⁴³

The findings concluded that due to poor coordination between media and PDMA, it is not included in the agenda of media houses to collect information about any danger or relevant precautions to avoid a disaster, which is very important as a social cause. Similarly, the disaster management authorities are not providing relevant figures and statistics regularly to the media. Therefore, the role of media is not effective in this regard and most media houses are focusing on their financial benefits instead of their social responsibility. The data exposed that dependency of media on financial supporters and the affiliations of their owners also constrain media personnel from working freely. A study confirmed the same views that “despite all the roles that media has to play, it can’t be denied that media are also exploited by various sponsors to attain their own vested goals through publicity and image-building”.⁴⁴

Media, Public Awareness and Mitigation

An interviewee, Commander Syed Eusaf shared that “authorities have complete information about predictable disasters. They earmarked vulnerable areas after the 2010 floods and information is timely circulated among media organizations but the media usually just shares it (with the public) through a ticker without giving proper coverage or importance. He further said that “role of PTV (as a state channel) is significant in this regard.”⁴⁵ A relevant study in this regard concludes that providing warnings is undoubtedly the most obvious role of media in disaster management. Media is essential for warnings to be effective.⁴⁶ He further said that “NDMA tries to contact media regularly but media persons do not respond, and only consult and give proper coverage after the disaster reaches extreme proportions. However, it does have some positive effects in the form of increase in rescue and recovery efforts by pleading

⁴² P. J. Mir, (Group President, Din News and Media Group Lahore), in discussion with Hira Nadeem, Din News office, Lahore, December 6, 2017.

⁴³ Waqar Chaudhary, (Resident Editor Pakistan Observer Lahore), in discussion with Hira Nadeem, Daily Pakistan Observer, Lahore, November 14, 2017.

⁴⁴ Zubair Ahmed, “Disaster Risks and Disaster Management Policies and Practices in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis of Disaster Management Act 2010 of Pakistan.”

⁴⁵ Syed E. Viqar, (Deputy Director Response, National Disaster Management Authority (NIDM)) in discussion with Hira Nadeem, Prime Minister House, NDMA office, Islamabad, July 26, 2017.

⁴⁶ Joseph Scanlon, Gillian Osborne, and Scott McClellan, *The 1992 Peace River Ice Jam and Evacuation: An Alberta Town Adapts to a Sudden Emergency* (Ottawa: Emergency Communications Research Unit, 1996).

charitable actions from the people”.⁴⁷ Although, there are some negatives about the way media has been covering disasters but its importance can't be denied due to the significant role it plays or can play in all the stages of dealing with any disaster.⁴⁸

Thus, media in Pakistan is not playing a proactive role; rather it is playing a reactive role in reporting disasters, Dr. Babar Alam, Operations Officer, World Health Organization, mentioned during interview. He further said that “media does not warn people about disasters or create awareness about precautions.”⁴⁹ Nashmia Mahmood, Health Officer, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Pakistan mentioned in her interview that, “communication is the key to successful disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery”.⁵⁰ Accurate information disseminated to the general public, to elected officials, community leaders, and the media reduces risk, saves lives and property, and accelerates recovery efforts.⁵¹ Some of the natural disasters can be prevented if media timely educates people about the consequences of their dangerous activities and hazardous actions.

It can be said that the Pakistani media is doing reactive reporting instead of proactive one. It highlights an issue only when it gets worse as the news value increases. Media doesn't positively impact preparedness phase of disaster management. The study suggests that media can be helpful in preparedness phase of semi-predictable disasters in terms of awareness raising, evacuation and precautionary measures need to be taken.⁵² Pakistani media's performance is a big question mark because it has its own issues to resolve. It is more involved in politics than social and other crucial human issues. Further, a journalist's experience of covering a natural disaster is an eye-opener, but it is also a learning experience

⁴⁷ Syed E. Viqar, (Deputy Director Response, National Disaster Management Authority (NIDM)) in discussion with Hira Nadeem, Prime Minister House, NDMA office, Islamabad, July 26, 2017.

⁴⁸ Pradeep Nair, “Role of Media in Disaster Management.”

⁴⁹ Babar Alam, (Operations Officer, World Health Organization), in discussion with Hira Nadeem, World Health Organization office, Gulberg, Lahore, October 8, 2017.

⁵⁰ Nashmia Mahmood, (Health Officer, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)), in discussion with Hira Nadeem, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Pakistan, Serena, Islamabad, January 3, 2018.

⁵¹ Anam Muzamill, “A Comparative Study of Natural Disasters News Coverage in Pakistan by Dawn & the News (The Case of Earthquake 2005, & Floods 2010).”

⁵² Lubna Zaheer, “Print Media Coverage of Natural Disasters and Its Impact on Disaster Management in Pakistan (The Case of Earthquake 2005, Flood 2010 and Famine 2014),” 116.

because covering from the studio and covering a disaster on the spot are very different from each other.⁵³

Mobilizing the community and preparing for a disaster are the ultimate solution, and media doesn't currently have a significant role in this regard. Therefore, it can be concluded that media's role in mitigating a disaster is not note-worthy at present. On one hand, the data discloses the negatives of media practices and on the other hand, a few respondents believe that disaster reporting and media coverage post-disaster have positive effects as they can increase rescue and relief efforts, attract local financial aid and international donations, and above all it can bring an issue to the notice of the high-ups.

Findings also show that media can hold people accountable not just after a disaster has struck but even before it happens, based on the level of preparations that officials and authorities have made for a possible calamity like floods that occur every year in the monsoon season. Media can question authorities in advance about mitigating measures they have taken.

Media Personnel Training

"Trained media professionals are required in order for media to play its role effectively" as stated by interviewee, P. J. Mir, Group president, Din News and Media Group Lahore.⁵⁴ It appeared in the data that when it comes to disaster coverage, the reporters learn by experience as there isn't any special team related to disasters, and disaster reporting falls under general reporting. Therefore, it can be said that this lack of training causes issues in responsible reporting. A study stressed on the dangers of poor education of reporters and stated that media personnel hardly have any proper education or training regarding disaster reporting and disaster management principles.⁵⁵ Another study concluded that the people from media must be willing to educate themselves and learn the terminologies and practices related to disaster management as proper education related to disasters ensures better performance of media personnel in disasters.⁵⁶

On the basis of respondents' views, it can be argued that there is a lack of coordination and planning by media, as media doesn't co-ordinate with authorities as it should. For this reason, it is important that reporters as well as anchor-persons from all media houses must be educated

⁵³ Peter Vasterman, C. Joris Yzermans, and Anja J. E. Dirkzwager, "The Role of the Media and Media Hypes in the Aftermath of Disasters."

⁵⁴ P. J. Mir, (Group President, Din News and Media Group Lahore), in discussion with Hira Nadeem, Din News office, Lahore, December 6, 2017.

⁵⁵ Sonya Forte Duhe, "Communicating Katrina: A Resilient Media," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 26, no. 2 (August 2008): 112-27.

⁵⁶ Pradeep Nair, "Role of Media in Disaster Management."

regarding disaster management to eliminate the lack of coordination and emphasize on a proper mechanism for disaster reporting in pre- and post-disaster phases. The study reveals that media has an important role to play in preparedness phase of disaster management. Timely mass awareness campaigns through the media may help prevent and/or mitigate losses due to a disaster.⁵⁷ However, it was found in qualitative data that media coverage is not casting any impact on preparedness phase of disaster management currently in Pakistan.⁵⁸

Conclusion and Recommendations

On the basis of results of this qualitative study, it can be concluded that the media has become an integral part of proper functioning of society. Communication has importance in all the fields and its significance in disaster management cannot be overlooked. Natural disasters are increasing the world over primarily due to climate change, and Pakistan is a disaster-prone country where every year different types of disasters cause massive destruction. Therefore, it is important to find a solution for disaster mitigation through public awareness in pre-disaster phase. However, the findings of this research revealed that media does not play the role that it should play in the pre-disaster phase and it has failed the masses in this regard. Media is not as active in pre-disaster phase as it should be for disaster mitigation.

It was also found that media does not question authorities on time; even the coordination of disaster management organizations with media is poor. The media only gets active during the post-disaster phase. Disaster reporting does help the masses in post-disaster phase by giving information but it doesn't make proactive efforts to reduce the damage in advance that any predictable disasters can cause. The media has become reactive and it hardly takes proactive measures. Apart from this, a major setback is the lack of training and education of media personnel in the field of disaster reporting.

Media should also provide information to people about high risk situations from time to time as a social cause, not making it a matter for more earning. As per PEMRA rules it is legally binding on Pakistani media houses to educate the masses about disasters/risks through social service messages, but news channels and newspapers hardly follow such rules at most times. The findings pertinently emphasize that the mass media can contribute significantly to minimizing the exposure and vulnerability of the potential victims. Hence, it can be said that the media needs to ensure

⁵⁷ Stephen Rattien, "The Role of the Media in Hazard Mitigation and Disaster Management," *Disasters* 14, no. 1 (March 1990): 36-45.

⁵⁸ Lubna Zaheer, "Print Media Coverage of Natural Disasters and Its Impact on Disaster Management in Pakistan (The Case of Earthquake 2005, Flood 2010 and Famine 2014)."

proper planning as well as a mechanism for disaster mitigation awareness and reporting in all phases by taking proactive steps.

Media Houses in Pakistan

Following are some recommendations drawn from the literature review and in-depth interviews of several relevant people: Media houses should ensure that the news content being shared is authentic. They should follow reporting ethics and be sensitive while reporting about a disaster. They should be active in all phases of disaster management. They should train media personnel to enhance their capacity for understanding key disaster terms and the scope of the disaster. Media organizations should set a separate department for crisis and disaster reporting. They should have specialized trained beat reporters for disasters. They should try to be pro-active by using the power to influence the masses, timely and wisely. They should stay in contact with authorities throughout the year and give disaster awareness its due importance.

Disaster Management Authorities

They should have regular interaction with media houses and provide them with important information. They should closely monitor disaster news stories covered by media. They should ensure that media shares timely and reliable information and public service messages. They should properly use all the resources at disposal for spreading disaster-awareness. Relevant laws and code of conduct should be formulated. The laws and rules that already exist should be properly enforced and practiced. They can also increase political involvement in order to make leaders more responsive and trigger donations from the international community. They should formulate effective policies and try to find constructive long term solutions.

Media Users

They should keep an eye on all reports related to potential disaster situations. They should be vigilant and active in their response. They should take the reports and warnings given by media seriously. They should take proactive preparatory measures based on past experiences and reports. They should make contributions in efforts to deal with disasters. They should provide feedback to media houses to focus on this issue more often.

This study opens avenues for future research. Researchers may study the media's patterns of disaster coverage using content analysis method; comparative analysis of role played by different modes of media communication i.e. print, electronic or social media in disaster mitigation can also be done; or an ethical perspective on relation of media to disaster mitigation would also be an interesting domain to inquire.

