

Repackaging News Content: Exploring Routines of Pakistan's Wire Services

*Sohail Taj, Saqib Riaz and Babar Hussain Shah**

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to explore editorial processes of wire services in Pakistan, specifically looking at repackaging of content to reproduce news – a phenomenon known as Churnalism. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from wire services operating in Islamabad, Pakistan. Editors of wire services, recognised by the government's Press and Information Department (PID), including the state-owned Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), were interviewed. It was found that wire services are heavily reliant on press releases, publicity reports, and monitoring of mainstream and social media for their reporting. Editors of wire services were of the view that their work is plagiarised, and this practice is more prevalent in regional newspapers. A strong dependence on government grants, allocated for news agencies, was also noted. No physical or online presence of several news agencies, recognised by the PID, could be found.

Keywords: Wire services, news agencies, repackaging, Churnalism, media routines.

* *Mr Sohail Taj* is a reporter / producer in Pakistan.

Dr Saqib Riaz is Chairman, Department of Mass Communication, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Dr Babar Hussain Shah is Lecturer at the Department of Mass Communication, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reliance on pre-packaged material has become an international phenomenon. To save resources and capital, wire services heavily rely on news items released by national and international wire services, monitoring services, reports (surveys, statistical or departmental reports), press releases, the Internet and social media. This practice is replacing investigative and quality on-ground journalism. British journalist Nick Davies coined the term ‘Churnalism’ for such media practices in his book *Flat Earth News* (2009). He was of the view that such practices of copy-paste deteriorate quality journalism. He further explained that such practices result in plagiarism which is against the ethics of journalism. The reuse of material already published or broadcast is malpractice and against the spirit of professional journalism (Ibid.).

The media industry in Pakistan witnessed gigantic growth over the last decade. At the same time, the Public Relations (PR) industry enhanced its outreach using emails and WhatsApp to media and news agencies. Media, as the fourth estate, ought to investigate genuine issues for the sake of the public and in the cause of democracy. Reliance on press releases and ready-made content for publicity destroys the role of media as a watch dog. ‘Churnalism’ (Davies 2009) by news agencies is far more hazardous because they understand the needs of media organisations and their work is demand-driven. Consequently, news items coming from wire services naturally become credible and these items are carried for publishing and broadcasting. In fact, this study found that PR content was often released by wire services in relevant news categories without a press release tag.

According to a respondent, Pakistani news agencies also apply for government grants on the basis of their published news content. This amount varies depending on released items and category of news agency and is around PKR four million per annum. The government supports wire services to uplift quality of private journalism and its practices by supporting diversity.¹ If wire services are relying on repackaging, tax payer money is not being utilised properly. In addition, wire services subscribe to national and international news agencies and repackage their news with their own by-lines and send

¹ Ameen Jaan Marwat, former Director Home and Publicity Department, PID, ‘Registration of News Agencies in Pakistan’, *Pers. Commun.*

them to subscribed clients. News agencies have monitoring sections which monitor already broadcast and published news items on social media and mainstream media.

Repackaging practices like ‘Churnalism’ hurt real journalism. It is, therefore, important to study how Pakistan’s wire services carry out their operations. Due to time and resource constraints, convenient sampling technique was used and interviews were conducted with one editor / spokesperson from each PID-recognised wire service.

2. BACKGROUND OF WIRE SERVICES

‘Wire Services’ are commonly known as news agencies and their primary function is to disseminate news items to other dependent outlets. While wire services are like other media in terms of gathering news and publicising it, this news is not meant directly for the public, rather the role of a news agency is like a wholesale retailer who provides news items in bulk (according to their capability and resources) to the media. Their clients retail received news as per their requirement (Boyd-Barrett 2013).

Broadcasters and publishers subscribe to news agencies. These subscribers may vary from direct broadcasters like television and radio channels to newspapers, magazines, periodicals etc. There is a perception that all media outlets do not have the resources to maintain a large infrastructure, therefore, reliance on wire services becomes a better option. Wire services track important day-to-day happenings and they become a source of news for other media outlets. From 1960-70, pigeons were used for exchange of information between the cities of Europe. The same idea evolved into wire services for disseminating and exchanging information on a large scale. The idea, conceived from the courier pigeon converged into establishing services that became a global need (Sharma 2011). After the telegraph was invented, wire services became the backbone of news gathering. For more than 150 years, wire services have managed news flow and remained a vital platform. Bielsa (2008) discussed that wire services play a major role in globalisation. Their global reach can be understood by studying the Agence France-Presse (AFP) network which has its presence in 125 countries. Global news agencies are creating news content, circulating information and developing worldwide networks and connections.

In Pakistan, the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) is a premier news agency. It is state-run and works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage (MoIB). Being a state-owned news agency, it is

considered to be the mouthpiece of the government and the gap of non-government news is filled by the private news media (Riaz 2004).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Johnston and Forde (2011) have highlighted that the term ‘Churnalism’ has been under debate in the media discourse for a long time, including issues like ‘recycling’, and use of press releases and news production by wire services. The same concept was discussed by Harcup in the book *Journalism* (2004) before Davies (2009). It pointed out that news production is no different from the assembly line of a factory having two source units for media: a. wire services; and b. press releases.

Jackson and Moloney (2015) looked into the reasons for ‘Churnalism’ and repackaging routines and found that ready-made press releases by professionals was a major cause of repackaging. PR professionals understand the need of media and journalists. They provide material in the required style. Therefore, ready-made news content is carried as it saves resources. Boumans et al. (2018) explored empirically how online news portals heavily rely on wire services and accommodate news with little or no editing. The study was conducted in the Dutch news landscape and studied how wire services do not reveal the actual sources and repackage content. Reese and Shoemaker (2016) explained that media routines are patterns that form the immediate structure of media functioning, behaviour and news coverage routines. These are unwritten, understood ways of working which reflect on screen or appear as end-product in the shape of a newspaper. These could be values, packed journalism, static rituals and structure, etc.

Wire services are important for mainstream media. Whitney and Becker (1982) concluded that on average, news editors spend four days working on news released by wire services. A study about the Australian Associated Press by Johnston and Forde (2011) argued that trends for over 50 years show that journalists as well as organisations opt for ready-made news by public firms, and news agencies and trends of investigative journalism are almost zero. Same is the case with wire services which reproduce material, and journalists play the role of silent partners by accepting their work without any investigation.

McChesney (2012) highlighted that journalism at a freefall stage declines in quality because media organisations are shrinking due to downsizing manpower. News rooms have minimal staff and focus on tailor-made news stories being sent by official sources

and PR departments. On top of that, press releases are not investigated and the watch dog or whistle-blower role of media is diminishing. This attitude ultimately affects democracy as there is minimum check and balance from media on government and the people in authority. The 2012 study explained the present downfall of journalism and how many news releases were being given by news organisations which were not investigated.

In addition, another missing link is that there is no count of the content coming from the official sources and becoming ‘news’. Ramos (2014) underscored that wire services have been a backbone of news gathering. Government, private bodies and other organisations have been funding them. However, the Internet has enhanced the pace and need for complex information.

Khan and Haider (2015) studied the influence of organisational routines on media content using survey method with 566 journalists working in mainstream media from Multan, Pakistan. Majority of those surveyed were of the view that media practices such as gatekeeping, reliance on official sources, dependence of media organisations etc., impact the process of news making. Since theirs was a regional study, it offered the scope to conduct a national level study. The present study aimed to fill the above gaps and explore these issues by compiling data and practices through interviews of representatives of government-recognised wire services in Pakistan.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based on two important theories of communication – ‘Gatekeeping’ and ‘Influence’. Gatekeeping emphasises how media content is filtered and finally delivered to the masses, whereas theories of influence critically analyse the factors which affect the media content before it is delivered to the public. The theory of ‘Gatekeeping’ was first presented by psychologist Kurt Lewin (1943) who was of the view that there are forces which facilitate or block news items from reaching an audience through the process of gatekeeping. This theory was applied by White (1950) who argued that wire news editors make decisions about the ‘killing’ or disseminating of news (cited in Cassidy 2006). An experimental research also explored that wire services play the role of gatekeeping by controlling the number of stories in different categories and it becomes necessary for news editors to pick a balanced mix from news items (Whitney and Becker 1982).

This current research study is also linked to the theories of influence on media content by Shoemaker and Reese (1996). They demonstrated a hierarchy comprising of different levels that have influence on media content:

- Individual media workers
- Organisational influence
- Extra-organisational Influence
- Media routines, and
- Ideology (Ibid.).

This study has particularly focused on media routines (or editorial processes) i.e., reliance on press releases and ready-made content coming from various sources. In the present study, it was found that gatekeepers were making the decision that news coming from PR departments may be released as their own news. They were also in a position to repackage the content with their own title, and hence, violating ethics of journalism.

While media routines (Ibid.) can be applied on monitoring of news, a news organisation uses its resources i.e., reporter, sub-editor and in case of television, outdoor broadcasting van and other technical staff; while the monitoring desk of a news agency carries the news while giving least credit to the original source. The monitoring desk in the source bracket mentions that news was monitored; while writing the news, they may add ‘according to a private news channel.’ Repackaging of content by monitoring other news sources was found to be a ‘media routine’.

5. METHODOLOGY

A Press and Information Department (PID) of the MoIB document² explicates that their Central News Desk (CND) is in coordination with 13 national-level news agencies. PID was requested to provide a list all news agencies that have a declaration for operation, including those agencies which are taking funds from the Ministry. Keeping financial matters confidential, a list of news agencies was provided from which their CND was receiving news items. An official government letter provided the grounds to explore the practices of news agencies that were operating and releasing news to the CND of PID. News items by APP were not recorded by PID as APP is itself a government entity. Table

² Reference number No. F.1 (1)2018-CND.

1 is the list of news agencies and their released news items for the period October 2017-March 2018):

Table 1: News Agencies Recognised by PID and Stories Released

No	Name of News Agency	Stories Released (Oct 2017- Mar 2018)
1	Pakistan Institute of National Affairs (PINA)	Nil
2	South Asian Broadcasting News Agency (SABAH)	3703
3	Independent News Pakistan (INP)	8701
4	Diplomatic News Agency (DNA)	602
5	News Network International (NNI)	2703
6	Pakistan Press International (PPI)	Nil
7	Inter News	Nil
8	Asian News Network (ANN)	8650
9	Interfaith News Agency (IFN)	02
10	Burning News Agency	135
11	Dispatch News Agency – Note	Nil
12	Kashmir Press International	Nil
13	United Press International	91
14	Associated Press of Pakistan – State Owned News Agency	Record not maintained by Press and Information Department

Source: PID Official Letter No. F.1 (1)2018-CND.

The methodology of semi-structured face-to-face interviews was used and eight officials from the news agencies were interviewed. This methodology allows focused two-way communication contrary to questionnaire framework where a detailed questionnaire is formed ahead of the interview. In this case, the questions are general and some questions are created during the interview to probe information relevant to the issue. This methodology is executed in Social Sciences at early stages of exploratory research. Such interviews are effective when focused textual data is needed.

Editors were the main respondents. However, in some agencies, the Chief Reporter was the most concerned person such as in APP and Online, therefore, management of the wire services authorised them to give interviews. Initially, a list was made which analysed the

stakeholders involved and their data was collected. Phone calls were made to take consent for the interview and representatives were explained what the research was. Those who asked for the questionnaire³ in advance were sent one via email. The interview responses were recorded using the mobile phone recorder. The questions were open-ended so that the respondents could explain the routine of their organisation in detail.

6. JOURNALISTIC STAFF VS. NON-JOURNALISTIC STAFF IN WIRE SERVICES

Table 2 outlines the details about the human resources and total number of news stories released by each wire service. It shows that the number of news items is more than available human resources. In fact, it was observed that wire services were releasing more news items than the number of personnel they have. For instance, the Diplomatic News Agency (DNA) was releasing 300 news items per day with just 8 journalists, indicating repackaging of news content:

Table 2: Average Stories and Employees

No	Name of News Agency	Average Stories / Day	Number of Employees	
			Journalists	Non-Journalists
1	APP – English	80-100	30	4
2	APP – Urdu	500	53	29
3	Pakistan Institute of National Affairs (PINA)	Working as Karachi-based think tank and not as news agency		
4	South Asian Broadcasting News Agency (SABAH)	300 - Urdu 100 - English	50	13
5	Independent News Pakistan (INP)	300 - Urdu 200 - English 100 - On weekend	50	5
6	Diplomatic News Agency (DNA)	200 - 300 Incl. pictures	8	1
7	News Network International (NNI)	200 - Urdu 100 - English	6	14 incl. composers
8	Pakistan Press International (PPI)	Islamabad office has staff of two. Almost non-operational.		

³ See Appendix 1.

9	Inter News	No contact established. Landline, mobile numbers switched off.		
10	Asian News Network (ANN)	International content is available on website, whereas Pakistan addresses and phone number not given. Contact number obtained from other sources was not responding.		
11	Interfaith News Agency (IFN)	Doesn't exist online. Phone number obtained was not responding.		
12	Burning News Agency	Doesn't exist online. No phone number could be obtained.		
13	Dispatch News Agency	Chief Editor was not responsive.		
14	Kashmir Press International (KPI) (Part of SABAH)	35-40	8	0
15	United Press International	No online presence and no contact could be obtained.		
16	Online	500 - Urdu 200 - English	40 20 for English	30

Source: Authors' own.

7. RESULTS

This section offers an overview of the interviews conducted with eight officials of news agencies to provide a complete landscape of wire services, their routines, human resource, dependency on government funds and shared sources. Descriptive research methodology was used to tabulate the data.

7.1. About Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)

This is a premier state-owned news agency having the largest network of ten offices nationwide that include bureau offices in provincial capitals and stations in major cities. More than 500 correspondents and stringers contribute to the national wire service. APP has various desks, including local and international languages. Only two services i.e., English and Urdu services were analysed here. Both English and Urdu services of APP are dependent on press releases and the Agency takes credit for the news as their work. However, the English service calls the source for clarification and details when needed. While repackaging, it was mentioned that the source was a press release. The English Service used statistics as news and utilised them for further work and investigation. Complete credit is taken by the Agency as a reporter / sub-editor listens and rewrites. A separate desk called Monitoring Service at APP scribes news in English. Journalists also receive tickers, news, information through WhatsApp and Twitter. The respondents were of the view that important departments like the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR)

had shifted to sharing news via Twitter. Ministers also give statements utilising social media, therefore, reliance on social media is there. However, they were uncertain about the trend in numbers as use of social media is often personal. According to the representative of the English Service, their news was plagiarised by changing the introduction, amending the credit, and published by newspapers or other wire services. It was found that the Agency does not give credit when ministries or the Press Relation Officer (PRO) disseminates news.

Table 3: Routines of Associated Press of Pakistan

No.	Indicators	Urdu Service Daily	English Service Daily
1	Press releases	50% of total released items	15%
2	Reports, stats, data etc. by different depts.	10-15%	Vary
3	News of other agencies	10-15%	Separate desk deals
4	Monitoring of TV	>10%	No data
5	Social media	-	-
6	Perception about their work being plagiarised / repackaged	70%	20-30%
7	Management pressure for quantity	Negative	Negative
8	Resource Person	Hanif Sabir Chief News Editor	Aftab Zahoor Chief Reporter

Source: Authors' own.

Analysis

APP is a national-level news agency. However, it is focused on ministries, press releases, and data released by government departments etc., due to which it ignores the opposition, protests and other such events which could be equally newsworthy. Too much reliance on official sources indicates that the wire service is repackaging content released by government sources.

7.2. About Diplomatic News Agency (DNA)

DNA is basically a diplomatic news agency and its editor has 30 years' experience in the field of journalism. He believes that owners of other news agencies are not journalists or successors of journalists' owners. He was of the opinion that PID does not have the correct data for the news agency. Their email inbox was often full and news creeds often bounce back. DNA does not have any contract or subscription with national news agencies. It has verbal agreements with international news agencies in Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan and moving towards formal agreements. All news creeds were shared with these news agencies, whereas only limited items of common interest were picked. 8-10 national channels were being monitored, while those foreign channels were monitored where Pakistan has active foreign missions and vibrant embassies. Such news items were released with the credit of DNA. Their purpose of monitoring channels and reliance on social media is intended to match pace and competition. News through social media was gathered when it was from ministers and official accounts. Websites of PID and radio were monitored and their news content released with DNA credit. According to the editor, a news agency should have online presence and reflect itself at Alexa (a website that shows ratings). The respondent shared that the government used to pay PKR 0.15 million per month, however, the current government has stopped payments till development of a proper policy. Centreline is the diplomatic magazine of DNA which is earning money and has APNS certification.

Table 4: Routines of Diplomatic News Agency

No	Indicators	
1	Press releases	100 (50%)
2	Reports, stats, data etc. by different depts.	20-30 (10%)
3	News of other agencies	5-10 (5%)
4	Monitoring of TV	10-15 (7%)
5	Social media	PID, Radio, APP (through PR)
6	Perception about their work being plagiarised / repackaged	Rarely
7	Management pressure for quantity	Negative
8	Resource Person	Ansar Mahmood Bhatti Editor / Owner

Source: Authors' own.

Analysis

DNA has a small office and a magazine that concentrates on reporting of foreign diplomats in Pakistan. The purpose of the magazine is to generate revenue. The editor agreed that the agency was working with limited resources and they were relying on government websites i.e., Radio Pakistan, PID and APP. The editor opined that open access to the content of wire services would be good for journalism but that such access may also result in 'Churnalism' by some elements who copy-paste content.

7.3. About News Network International

The agency was established in 1992 as a pioneer Urdu news agency. The owner Hafiz Abdul Khaliq was a seasoned journalist and maintained a good reputation when technology was not accessible. PPI, APP and NNI would get excellent response as newspapers had very limited resources. Government events were mainly covered by PPI, APP, and Radio Pakistan. NNI does not have too many resources. It gets a grant of PKR 28 lakh, while subscription charges are minimal. There are no formal contracts, subscriptions or formal understanding with news agencies. However, news items were copied from websites of Chinese News Agency Xinhua and Iran's news agency Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA). APP gives limited access to news and the respondent felt that it was not right to limit access since it was a representative of the state. He also

shared that credit should be given; however, it had become practice that content was plagiarised and repackaged. According to the respondent, such practices were more common in Urdu dailies compared to English. Tickers had become common source of plagiarism. NNI has one person on the Monitoring Desk who copied news content from social media, official websites, agencies' websites and news source available online. Approximately 20 news items were being copied and released. Proper monitoring and paraphrasing were not available because available staff did not have required qualification and news sense. It was found that the government used to allocate specific amounts for news agencies in the budget. However, later allocation was made subject to performance. This strategy was used as tool to pressurise the agencies, according to the respondent.

Table 5: Routines of NNI

No.	Indicators	
1	Press releases	60 – Government and private both (20%)
2	Reports, stats, data etc. by different depts.	Nil – Don't have resources
3	News of other agencies	Nil
4	Monitoring of TV	Nil
5	Social media	15-20 (7%)
6	Perception about their work being plagiarised / repackaged	Yes – no count of quantity as it is routine
7	Management pressure for quantity	Negative
8	Resource person	Tahir Khan Editor

Source: Authors' own.

Analysis

Like other respondents, the NNI editor also agreed that content was repackaged and open accessed websites such as news agencies of China and Iran were popular platforms used for content repackaging.

7.4. About South Asian Broadcasting News Agency (SABAH)⁴

The agency was established in 2014 which had English, Urdu, pictorial services as well as Arabic and Sindhi services. The latter two services were discontinued due to financial problems. The agency has bureau offices in major cities like Peshawar, Faisalabad, and Muzaffarabad. Semi-paid offices also exist in New Delhi and New York. SABAH's old name 'South Asian News Agency (SANA)' was changed due to legal and license issues. According to the respondent, the BBC and VOA quoted the news agency because of its creditability. Small-scale and regional newspapers plagiarised and did not give credit as they only have page-makers and all the newspapers are plagiarised. He stressed that national news agencies did give credit especially when a story was sensitive and pressure might come as result. SABAH was planning to stop creed to PID as the government had already stopped funds for the agency as it was earning enough through subscriptions.

Table 6: Routines of SABAH

No.	Indicators	
1	Press releases	20%
2	Reports, stats, data etc. by different depts.	20-25 (8%) Further investigation of reporting
3	News of other agencies	Nil
4	Monitoring of TV	20%
5	Social media	20-25 (8%)
6	Perception about their work being plagiarised / repackaged	80-90% - small and regional. At national level ratio is low
7	Management pressure for quantity	Negative
8	Resource person	Shakeel Turabi Editor

Source: Authors' own

⁴ KPI and SABAH both function under the same administration.

Analysis

SABAH can be considered the most competent news agency that is generating its finances independently from its subscribers. Therefore, its reliance on government resources was limited and agency had a trend of investigative reporting which minimises ‘Churnalism.’

7.5. About Kashmir Press International (KPI)

Kashmir Press International (KPI) is owned by SABAH and working with limited resources having dedicated staff of eight. KPI releases up to 90 news stories which are based on monitoring, reports, statements by Kashmiri leaders etc. Existence of KPI raises the question that when a national level news agency namely ‘SABAH’ is working, why does KPI have to be there? It indicates that another name of the same brand is there to mark that a whole news agency works dedicatedly for the Kashmir cause. KPI utilises the same office premises and supporting staff of SABAH.

7.6. About Pakistan Press International (PPI)

PPI is working as a regional news agency and focusing on Sindh at the moment. An Islamabad office exists with staff limited to two persons. The Bureau Chief looks after the office, while a few online stories are paraphrased. It is focused on Non-Government Organisations, Pakistan Press Foundation, and working on capacity building of journalists and mainly funded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.⁵

7.7. About Independent News Pakistan (INP)

The Independent News Pakistan (INP) is working in Urdu and English languages. It had regional service in Sindhi language which was discontinued due to lack of resources. Strength of the agency is 80, including regional correspondents. The editor hesitated in providing numerical data, however, he shared that they had a central system to receive emails and several press releases were received per minute. News stories from known

⁵ Rehman, M.U. 2018, ‘Routines of PPI’, *Pers. Commun.*

sources were reviewed and released with the credit of the agency; while news items from unknown sources were confirmed and rechecked. The agency follows self-censorship policy. News items that are not in the national interest, are against the state, affect religious sentiments etc. were edited even when pressure was exerted. The Agency has news exchange agreement with Xinhua and its news items were released with INP's credit. The Monitoring Desk has staff of 2-6 persons who monitor different channels in three shifts and news items were released with the credit of the INP editor.

7.8. About Online News Agency (ONA)

The Online News Agency (ONA) is a major news agency of the country. However, it was not included in the creed received by PID. The agency has partnership with Urdu daily newspaper *Jinnah* and English daily newspaper *Morning Mail*. It is working in Urdu and English languages. Primarily, Urdu desk files the news stories and English personnel pick and translate. Seven staff members monitor different channels. Press releases were filed by beat reporters with credit of reporter and agency with minor makeup. 'Chocolaty news' was taken from social media, besides official accounts. Websites of international news agencies were being visited and news items are picked and repackaged with the agency's credit.

Table 7: Routines of ONA Data

No.	Indicators	
1	Press releases	16 beat reporters file with their credit
2	Reports/stats/data etc. by different depts.	Focus on audit reports 6-7 news stories daily
3	News of other agencies	No agreement, news items are copied from websites randomly
4	Monitoring of TV	50
5	Social media	Source of 'chocolaty news'
6	Perception about their work being plagiarised / repackaged	90%
7	Management pressure for quantity	Negative
8	Resource person	Zafar Malik Chief Reporter

Source: Authors' own.

8. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Most of these agencies were found to be relying on press releases, while wire services did not have any estimates about their reliance on social media. They were also using websites and social media accounts of organisations working under the umbrella of the MoIB. Most of the respondents believe that their work was being repackaged by newspapers and other peers.

Table 8: Comparative Analysis of Wire Services' Routines

No.	Indicators	APP Urdu	APP English	DNA	NNI	SABAH	Online
1	Press releases	50%	15%	50%	20%	20%	Reporters
2	Reports/stats/data by different depts.	10-15%	Vary	10%	N/A	8%	6-7 daily
3	News of other agencies	10-15%	Separate Desk	5%	N/A	Nil	Copy from Web
4	Monitoring of TV	>10%	No Data	7%	N/A	20%	50 items
5	Social media	-	-	Govt Media	7%	8%	Source of chocolatey news
6	Perception about their work being plagiarised/repackaged	70%	20-30%	Rarely	Positive	80-90%	90%
7	Management pressure for quantity	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative

Source: Authors' own.

9. DISCUSSION

This study found that the Press and Information Department (PID) does not have correct data of released news items by national news agencies. It only focuses on the news which

favours the government for publicity purpose. The government's grant allocation is subject to performance which is a control tactic. As done so in the past, allocations should be clear and announced in the fiscal budget. If any organisation is not performing up to the mark, deductions can be made in future payments.

News agencies were heavily reliant on press releases, reports and on other media through their monitoring desks and took credit for it; when others used those stories, they would credit the wire service. Monitored news contained credit that news was obtained through monitoring, however, it does not offer which source was monitored. It was also observed that wire services were reluctant to quote names of private channels or newspapers as their sources; and that only agencies with ample human resources were working up to the mark, and were financially dependent on the government (except SABAH).

The data also indicates that various wire services did not have an online presence and even phone numbers were not available with their sister organisations. Such news agencies point to the intention of owners to receive grants from the government without contributing to the field of journalism. Copying news from Twitter and WhatsApp were routine practices of wire services. However, their quality cannot be measured. It must be pointed out that the results of this study are based on verbal interviews with the respondents and their statements were not cross-checked. The data compiled by PID was rejected by editors of wire services which indicates that it does not provide accurate information.

10. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The government should formulate a better working model to support wire services. A proper check and balance mechanism should be adopted through a third party to avoid pressure and control on content. Various studies do not support government aid to media organisations; therefore, wire services should be guided for generating capital through subscriptions. Monitoring desks have become legitimate sources of repackaging. While one organisation utilises its human resources (reporters) to get news, others monitor it and copy-paste it and take the credit. This area needs more research, including looking at whether reporters are also merely using press releases and contributing those to their wire service.

11. CONCLUSION

Wire services in Pakistan are highly dependent on government funding which gives the latter control on their overall operations which ultimately goes against the true spirit of free journalism. According to various newspapers like *Dawn*, during 2019, a former Federal Minister of the MoIB, in a press conferences criticised the media for relying on a business model which was not professional and dependent on the government. This dependence is causing downsizing and becoming a major reason for news agencies to adopt 'repackaging' of news as a routine practice. Very few wire services registered with the government undertake investigative, quality journalism; while others do not even have an online presence, let alone legitimate contact details and location. This indicates that owners may have registered as wire services to access government funds.

Wire services which are working with proper offices and staff are relatively better in terms of their journalistic content and are generating finances through subscribers. However, some of them were facing financial problems and were dependent on government funds. It was found that even those that were working with relatively better facilities and staff had more than 50% of their content based on press releases, the Internet, social media, and the monitoring desk.

REFERENCES

- Bielsa, E. 2008, 'The Pivotal Role of News Agencies in the Context of Globalization: A Historical Approach', *Global Networks*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 347-366.
- Boumans, J. Trilling, D. Vliegthart, R. and Boomgaarden, H. 2018, 'The Agency Makes the (Online) News World Go Round: The Impact of News Agency Content on Print and Online News', *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 12, pp.1768-1789, <<https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/7109/2330>>.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. 2013, 'Multinational News Agencies', in Enderwick, P. (ed.), *Multinational Service Firms*, London: Routledge, p. 25.
- Cassidy, W. P. 2006, 'Gatekeeping Similar For Online, Print Journalists', *Newspaper Research Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 6-23.

Davies, N. 2009, *Flat Earth News: An Award-Winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media*, London: Vintage Books.

Harcup, T. 2004, *Journalism Principles and Practice*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Jackson, D. and Moloney, K. 2015, 'Inside Churnalism - PR, Journalism and Power Relationships in Flux', *Journalism Studies*,
<<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/42142164.pdf>>.

Johnston, J. and Forde, S. 2011, 'The Silent Partner: News Agencies and 21st Century News', *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 5, pp. 195-214,
<<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/143854305.pdf>>.

Khan, M. A. and Haider, K. 2015, 'Impact of Media Routines on Construction of News Stories: Exploring the Practices of Print Media Journalists of Multan', *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 1151-1166.

Lewin, K. 1943, 'Forces behind Food Habits and Methods of Change' in *The Problem of Changing Food Habits, Report of the Committee on Food Habits 1941-1943*, Bulletin of the National Research Council, no. 108, pp. 35-65, Washington D.C.: National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences.

McChesney, R. W. 2012, 'Farewell to Journalism? Time for a Rethinking', *Journalism Studies*, vol. 13, no. 5-6, pp. 682-694.

Ramos, J. M. 2014, 'Reinventing the Wire: How to Prepare for Constant Disruptions', Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper, Oxford: University of Oxford.

Reese, S. D. and Shoemaker, P. J. 2016, 'A Media Sociology for the Networked Public Sphere: The Hierarchy of Influences Model', *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 19, pp. 389-409.

Riaz, D. S. 2004, 'Newspapers Reliance on News Agencies: A Content Analysis of the Major Newspapers of Pakistan', *South Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 177-190.

Sharma, J. K. 2011, *Business Statistics: For University of Delhi*, New Delhi: Pearson Education.

Shodh n.d. 'Introduction News Agencies', *Shodh Gangotri*,
<http://shodh.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/3413/2/02_introduction.pdf>, accessed 30 August 2018.

Shoemaker, P. J. and Reese, S. D. 1996, *Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, Second Edition, White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers.

Stephens, M. 2014, *Beyond News - The Future of Journalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.

White, D. M. 1950, 'The "Gate Keeper": A Case Study in the Selection of News', *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 383-390.

Whitney, D. C. and Becker, L. B. 1982, 'Keeping the Gates' for Gatekeepers: The Effects of Wire News', *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 59, pp. 60-65.

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is the number of journalistic and non-journalistic staff working in your organisation?
2. How many news items are released daily by your agency?
3. How many press releases do you receive on a daily basis?
4. How do you release these press releases? (Whether it is mentioned that it is a press release)
5. How many news stories are extracted by the reports released by different organisations?
6. Do you have subscriptions or agreements with national or international news agencies?
7. How do you release news items of other news agencies? (With your credit or with existing by-line)

8. Do you have a monitoring section? How many channels, sites are monitored per day?
9. How many stories do you take from social media, including WhatsApp?
10. Does the monitoring section take credit of news items?
11. Do you observe that your news stories are being repacked and plagiarised?
12. Do you receive pressure from management for quantity?