

Research Topic

**The Coverage of Easter bomb attacks in Tamil
Newspapers: A study based on Journalism ethics and
Conflict-sensitive journalism**

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1. Introduction

Bomb attack held on Easter Sunday, 2019

While Christians all over the world were celebrating the feast of the Risen Lord, Easter Sunday on the 21st of April, 2019, a series of bomb blasts were reported in Colombo, Negombo and Batticaloa district in the Eastern Province.

The following places were targeted, during the service was underway St. Anthony's Shrine situated in the foreshore police area in Kochchikade Colombo 13 , St. Sebastian Church situated in the Katana police area in Negombo in Katuwapitiya & Zeon Church at Batticaloa Furthermore, three five-star hotels located closer to Galle Face green viz, Shangri La, Kinsbury, Cinnamon Grand were also the places targeted.

It was noted that all these attacks were recorded in a particular interval of 45 minutes between 8.45 am and 9.15 am

It was on the same day another bomb blast was reported in front of the Zoological Garden at Dehiwala. It was a rest house known as New Tropical hotel and the blast was reported at 1.45 pm. As a continued event another last blast was reported at Mahawila Garden Luxury Housing complex in Colombo Dematagoda at 2.15 pm.

Due to this series of bombings, 278 including 27 foreign nationals lost their lives and 594 got injured.

The researcher observed that there was an ethnic centric approach being adopted and allegations on a section of a minority was imparted. There was also an allegation on the media for creating a negative trend.

Media coverage

The way the media covered the incidents were criticized by the public for agitating the sensitive situation. As a result, these events led to the blocking of Social Media Networks during the time.

Hence more responsibilities were vested on the mainstream media, therefore the mainstream media which had more responsibilities were compelled to follow the Journalism Ethical Guidelines to present the news to the public.

Dilemma of keeping ethical standard

As a profession, journalism depends on certain ethical standards to maintain the credibility needed to perform its role-related responsibilities. The professional acts of discovering, reporting, and disseminating the news depends on various technologies.

Journalistic ethics are the common values that guide reporters. They lay out both the aspirations and obligations that journalists, editors, and others working in the field should follow to execute their work responsibly.

Most news organizations have their own written codes of ethics, as do professional membership bodies. If a professional journalist or news organization transgresses these ethical standards, they will lose credibility.

Media outlets and journalism associations publish their own ethics codes that apply to their employees or members. These often offer more specific guidance on top of the standard principles.

Whether the Media followed Journalism Ethics during the period of Easter bomb attack and reported.

During this attack and which followed after these incidents how the Tamil media had reported should be analyzed based on the theme of Journalism Ethics.

The criteria of the journalism ethics in Sri Lanka

Two codes of ethics are in practice in Sri Lanka. The ethics is used to publish messages centered on them.

The guidelines for journalists are declared by the Sri Lanka Guideline of the Press Council and Code of Professional Practice of the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka.

- Sri Lanka Guideline of the Press Council
- Code of Professional Practice of the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka

There are codes of ethics available internationally for professional journalists

- The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics.
- The Radio Television Digital News Association's Code of Ethics.
- The New York Times Ethical Journalism Guidebook.

In addition to these, as the Easter bomb attack was much related to ethnic and biased reporting and conflict, the Conflict-Sensitive journalism guideline can also be considered under these criteria.

- Conflict-Sensitive Journalism Guide Line

1.1 Background

Following the Easter Day bombings, all media in Sri Lanka overturned and published the incident and presented according to their own agenda and the skepticism towards a minority race was increased.

News reports were published without any proper guidelines hence conflicts between the two ethnic groups were at its peak as news of racial conflicts emerged.

It is therefore necessary to investigate whether the news articles and pictures that were published in the newspapers at that time were following the opposing guidelines.

Sri Lanka emerged in a state of tension and fear following the suicide bombings in April 21, 2019 which also paved the way for a major rift between ethnicities and religions.

Especially when they suspect that the media is publishing news in such a way that there is no rift between religions and ethnicities in Sri Lanka.

In particular, it is investigated whether the news published in the media was based on the information sources or not. At the same time, ethnic centric news reporting has been the focus of reporting.

The study has been carried out to check whether the newspaper reports created a tension during the reporting process. At the same time the social media was disabled and people were relying mainly on the press. Publishing in the newspapers was therefore one of the most important aspects during this period.

What concerns us is how true that news report was and how it had to be examined.

At a time when ethnic centric and biasedness existed, it remains to be seen how the newspapers present the news through conflict-sensitive journalism. For example, how to report conflict time and how to use certain words e.g. - terrorist, suicide bomber, so that Tension can be used to describe the use of caricature and the use of words that appear to be very lowered at words.

1.2 Motivation

In Sri Lanka, there are four major ethnic and religious communities. In this way, the media exaggerates the racial and religious contradictions that emerge.

Therefore, the conflicts that arise in such cases have a lot of impact on the country. There are news reports that increase racial conflict. At such times, the question arises as to whether the media is responsible and disciplined in keeping with journalism.

Therefore, the researcher would like to conduct this study to find out whether the ethical guidelines were followed in the reporting with regard to the Easter bomb attack in Tamil newspapers.

2. Research Problem

2.1 Problem statement

Media reporting always leads to criticism and the problem initiated against a group of ethnic people in some areas. Did the media provide the right information to people during that period?

Did the media follow proper media guidelines to publish the news?

A particular group of people were targeted mostly by the Easter attack. The entire incident was taken on a racial basis and blame was focused on one particular community, this study will include how the media reported on the incident and how the reports were presented.

Following the suicide bombing that took place on April 21, 2019 in Sri Lanka the media published a variety of news reports. Tensions between ethnicities and religious communities had been exacerbated by news outlets, particularly those who do not adhere to media discipline and ethics.

Therefore, a study on how the major language looked into this incident and how Tamil newspapers have dealt with it and how the future for journalism in Sri Lanka, will establish harmony and peace between ethnicities and religions.

The Easter Sunday attack had made a serious impact on the stability of lives of Sri Lankans. It had created an unpleasant atmosphere among the communities, the downfall of the economy of the country, the arrival of tourists which was one of the revenue earners to the country and on the security system.

Hence a research was needed how the media reported these incidents since the eye was focused on the minority communities.

2.2 Research questions

1. How much priority and placement given by Tamil newspapers report on Easter bomb attacks?
2. How Tamil newspapers presented the news items on Easter bomb attack in order to maintain the ethical guideline in their presentation?
3. Whether the Tamil newspapers presented the news and feature articles in order to maintain the neutral view on the issue of Easter bomb attack?
4. How the Tamil newspapers presented their neutral view through the editorial with regard to the Easter bomb attack to their readers?
5. Have the Tamil media presented their views in accordance with media ethics and kept track of conflict sensitive journalism?

2.3 Research objectives

1. To find out how the priority and placement given by Tamil newspapers report on Easter bomb attacks.
2. To find out how the Tamil newspapers presented the news items on Easter bomb attack in order to maintain the ethical guideline in their presentation.
3. To trace out how the Tamil newspapers presented the news and feature articles in order to maintain the neutral view on the issue of Easter bomb attack.
4. To trace out whether the Tamil newspapers presented their neutral view through editorial regard to the Easter bomb attack to the audience.
5. To investigate How the Tamil newspapers presented their neutral view through the editorial with regard to the Easter bomb attack to their readers.
6. To find out how the Tamil media looked in parallel with the Conflict Sensitive Journalism and in accordance with guidelines.

3. Literature Survey

- **Ethical Journalism: News Coverage of Terrorism**

Ayten Gorgun Smith (Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia), Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey (Banu Baybars Hawks)

Published: 27 December 2019

This article examines how news media cover terrorism, and how public opinion has been influenced by the media coverage, with examples from different parts of the world. Media coverage of attacks, attackers or the activities of terror organisations informs the public, but it also serves as a major channel to spread the terror, and at the same time, these news get the attention of possible recruits to terror organisations. Thus, media coverage can directly and indirectly assist terrorist organisations to reach their goals. This paper will try to reveal whether the media, intentionally or unintentionally, reflects exaggerated accounts of violent terrorist acts or not. In this regard, ethical standards in the coverage of terrorism will be discussed. Content analysis of the recent attacks in the mosques of New Zealand and explosions in the churches and various places in Sri Lanka from Al Jazeera, the BBC, CNN, and The New Zealand Herald's (for New Zealand), and The Daily Mirror (for Sri Lanka) website articles, are undertaken by keyword searching.

- **Media and Conflict in Sri Lanka**

Journal Volume 30, 2003 - Issue 3 Sanjana Hattotuwa

Published online - 20 May 2016

This paper looks at Sri Lanka's media situation against the backdrop of the ceasefire following decades of violence. It explores the detrimental effects of the partisan media, and advocates conflict-sensitive journalism to mitigate against them.

- **Print Media Ethics**

Ramdas Nehulkar Assistant Professor Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth Pune

Comprise principles of ethics and of good practice as applicable to the specific challenges faced by journalists. This subset of media ethics is widely known to journalists as their professional "code of ethics" or the "canons of journalism".

Ethics are important in Journalism because they create guidelines for journalists to follow that help people from feeling unequal or outcast. They're also important in making sure that media stays true and further help journalists maintain a sense of equality

- **The Mumbai terrorist attacks: How influential are citizens in crisis news reporting? (2009)**

Authors Tng, Serene

Publisher University of Canterbury. Social and Political Sciences

From Hurricane Katrina to London bombings and the 2009 Iran elections, citizens are increasingly making themselves heard in mainstream news reporting. This study explores the extent of influence of citizen sources on crisis news reporting through a pilot case study content analysis of the New York Times, London Times, New Zealand Herald and Times of India on the 2008 Mumbai terrorist incident over a one-week period, from 26 November 2008 to 2 December 2008. Findings from this study found a high proportion of citizen sources used especially at the beginning stage of the Mumbai crisis, indicating the small window of opportunity event driven news offers for a greater inclusion of nongovernmental voices. While the media continued to be cautious, using citizen sources more for their conventional roles as witnesses or victims with firsthand accounts, there were some clear traces of influence with citizen sources offering analytical and political viewpoints in the Times of India. Contrary to the belief in citizen-journalists being able to offer breaking news in news reports, its impact remained small. A first study of its kind to examine the extent of citizen source influence in crisis news reporting through a case study analysis, the findings from this study will significantly add to literature on the potential influence of government and citizen voices in the media and raise understanding about situational factors that will affect their influence in crises.

- **Framing Of The Mumbai Terror Attacks By The Indian and The Pakistani Print Media**

Raina, Pamposh, The George Washington University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011. 1489046.

Political communication scholars argue that language and images are often used to highlight only certain aspects of a social or political reality. This is the reality that the political elites of a nation want their public to believe so that they can further their own political agenda. Due to the existing routines of newsgathering in the profession of journalism, journalists often find themselves echoing the same issues as the political elites, thus consciously or unconsciously aiding their political agenda. Consequently the public is only exposed to selected slices of reality and only that “reality” resonates with them. In this study I explore how the print media in India and Pakistan covered the Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008; to find out whether the print media in each country may have constructed an enemy narrative while reporting the terror attacks and whether the sources used to construct the narrative were the political elites of India and Pakistan. Since the news media play a central role in shaping public perception, if the enemy narrative did dominate the media coverage it might have accentuated the negative perception that each side has of the other. This could impact the renegotiation of peace talks between the two nuclear-armed neighbors and thus impede the peace process.

- **How Newspaper Editors and Broadcast News Directors View Media Ethics**

Douglas A. Anderson, Frederic A. Leigh

First Published January 1, 1992 Research Article

Newsroom concern about journalism ethics is no politically correct fad, say both editors and broadcast managers. And who's more ethical? Newspaper reporters, say editors, but three-quarters of broadcasters disagree. Neither print nor broadcaster people, however, think TV reporters are more concerned about ethics than are print reporters.

- **Are We Reporting According to Principles of Ethics? Five Case Studies from A Sri Lankan Newspaper**

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Principles of Ethics? Five Case Studies from A Sri Lankan Newspaper. In: Mathiventhan, T., Elango, P., Pagthinathan, M. and Arasaretnam, S. (eds.), Proceedings of the International Symposium on Gender Equity and Equality (ISGEE) 2017, Eastern University Sri Lanka, 23-29. Copy right © 2018, Eastern University Sri Lanka (EUSL)

According to the Gazette Notice of Code of Ethics for Journalists made by the Sri Lanka Press Council 1981, a journalist is expected to refrain from reporting/ printing or publishing any information on an individual's private life or identity. Further, facts, opinions, photographs and graphics related to the incident should have sensitivity and discretion subjected to its duty to publish in the public interest. However unnatural deaths of women and girl children are often a subject of speculation especially when due to external causes such as injury/trauma. A content analysis of 05 articles in a Sinhalese newspaper on unnatural deaths of females encountered in 2016 and 2017 revealed following information

- **An Examination of Newspaper Headlines on the Reporting of Islam in the New York Times between September 11, 2001 and June 11, 2002**

George A. Sands, IV, Clark Atlanta University Faculty Research Advisor: John Sanchez, Assistant Professor of Communications, Department of Journalism, College of Communications Pennsylvania State University

The September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers and the United State Pentagon may now be the most publicized media events in American history. Since then, the American news media are again faced with the issue of providing information to the masses about Muslim threats to this country while at the same time trying not to create anti-Muslim hysteria. This paper examines the reporting of Islam in the New York 2 Times newspaper headlines between September 11, 2001 and June 11th, 2002 to investigate if and how news media may be profiling Muslims in the news. A content analysis of these news headlines will also create categories for contemporary news reports on Muslims and Islam since 9/11.

The above literature is found by the researcher relevant to the proposed topic.

The review of literature suggests that even though many researchers, authors and writers have written about the media coverage about the Easter attacks, there is a research gap in terms of how Tamil media, to be specific Tamil newspapers reported the news on Easter attacks. Through my research I intend to fulfill the research gap by researching the proposed topic.

4. Methodology / Approach

To identify how Tamil newspaper handled the Easter attack coverage and to find whether the media ethics were used in publishing news.

The selected samples for the research - Tamil newspapers-Virakesari, Thinakaran and Thinakkural.

Time periodpublications - April 21st 2019 to May 21st 2019.

To the researcher will conduct a content analysis on the above newspapers published during the period of one month and the researcher will also concentrate on news feature articles and editorials of the above newspapers.

In the beginning Quantitative method is used and it will be continued using Qualitative methods as well.

First researcher will collect the total number of news published on Easter attack and will use the ethical guidelines to do the research which will lead me to use a qualitative method.

This study examines the problems faced by minority people after the Easter attacks.

Sri Lanka Guideline of the Press Council

Code of Professional Practice of the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka

The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics.

The Radio Television Digital News Association's Code of Ethics.

The New York Times Ethical Journalism Guidebook.

Conflict-Sensitive Journalism Guide Line

Researcher analyzed this study with the four guidelines mentioned above

In keeping with this 4 guide line, I analyzed how newspapers published the news, editorials and articles after the Easter Sunday attack.

This review will be on Quantitative and Qualitative analysis basis

Researchers analyzed the number of news stories that were published in the aftermath of the Easter attack, and then the number of news items published on the front page of newspapers.

Guidelines were kept tight when looking at quality. With Media Ethics, the company will be able to track how each news report is delivered and delivered correctly.

5. Deliverables

1. How the priority and placement given by Tamil newspapers to report on Easter bomb attack.
2. How the Tamil newspapers presented the news items on Easter bomb attack in order to maintain the ethical guideline in their presentation.
3. How the Tamil newspapers presented the news and feature articles in order to maintain the neutral view on the issue of Easter bomb attack.
4. Whether the Tamil newspapers presented their neutral view or editorial regard the Easter bomb attack to the audience.
5. How the Tamil media presented their views in accordance with media ethics and in favor of conflict-sensitive journalism.
6. How the Tamil media looked in parallel with the Conflict Sensitive Journalism and in accordance with guidelines.

6. Timeline

- Proposal Preparation - April
- Data collection -May
- Processing the data - May
- Analyzing the data – May - June
- Writing research report - June

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