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## Algorithmic Gatekeeping and News Inequality: Artificial Intelligence, Platform Prioritization, and the Future of Journalism in Pakistan

**Dr. Muhammad Irfan\***

Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology, Karachi.

[erfanaziz@fuuast.edu.pk](mailto:erfanaziz@fuuast.edu.pk)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9380-6861>

**Muhammad Farooq Sami**

Research Scholar, Mass Communication.

[farooqsami@live.com](mailto:farooqsami@live.com)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6780-6351>

**Tariq Ahmed**

Research Scholar, Mass Communication.

[tariq.ashfaq.ahmed@gmail.com](mailto:tariq.ashfaq.ahmed@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0690-7506>

\*Corresponding Author:

### ABSTRACT

The reorganization of journalistic gatekeeping through redefining editorial judgment as an algorithmic one is the most rapidly expanding branch of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The paper examines the implications of the latter in the Pakistani media system and the nexus between AI adoption, platform ranking and the trends of emerging news inequality. The paper presents an analytical synthesis conceptually of the socio-technological changes that have redefined the newsrooms in South Asia based on the developed Gatekeeping Theory (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). It is discussed that a booming technological caste system is also being formed in Pakistan where a digital divide in the AI infrastructure can expel voices in the region and in the Urdu language due to an invisibility of algorithms to an increasing extent. In addition, the paper deplores the loss of editorial sovereignty that would arise as a result of depending on the global black-box platforms. The paper will conclude by proposing a hybrid gatekeeping model that dwells on the transparency of algorithms and human-controlled as some of the protective interventions to the

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future of independent journalism in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Algorithmic Gatekeeping, News Inequality, Pakistan Journalism, Platform Prioritization, Digital Sovereignty.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Artificial Intelligence (AI) outsourced to the fringes of the journalistic process made its epicenter and the media world is transforming radically with the socio-technological revolution. News outlets are beginning to turn more toward AI-powered technologies to generate automated content, conduct data analysis on a grand scale, and deliver hyper-targeted content distribution to readers.

Although these developments are associated with new levels of efficiency in information processing and workflow automation, they also present critical ethical and structural issues of transparency, algorithmic bias, and editorial responsibility (Diakopoulos, 2019). Since these technologies are being integrated into media infrastructures, they no longer serve to support production; instead, they transform what the professional identity of the journalist is—who they are—and they transform the sovereign power of the newsroom.

Within the framework of media theory, the evolution of Gatekeeping Theory is the most appropriate explanation for this transformation. Historically, the term gatekeeping was used to explain how human editors acted as the key decision-makers in the business of information making, using professional judgment to decide the newsworthiness and presentation of events (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Non-human mediation, however, has been brought about by the emergence of algorithmic gatekeeping. Under this new paradigm, automated systems and platform logics shape the choice, prioritization, and publication of content, which are frequently driven by commercial metrics of engagement rather than civic or editorial values (Napoli, 2014). It is a combination of human will and the algorithmic performance that raises certain real life questions regarding the future of journalistic independence.

The media industry in Pakistan is an example of an individual and undeveloped transition. Even though the use of AI in Pakistan is still recent, the country is putting pressure on newsrooms to adjust to the digitalized globalized economy. The process has been complicated by broad structural impediments such as unequal technology infrastructure, unpredictable economic condition of the traditional media and lack of localized regulation systems of computerized content. Besides, the reliance of the international digital sources to distribute the news subjects the Pakistani material to the foreign algorithmic interests that are not necessarily conducive to a regional will.

The paper is a critical examination of how editorial practice is altered with the incorporation of technology, on the Pakistani newsroom using the Gatekeeping framework. It has argued that the trend of AI-generated journalism in Pakistan is shaping new patterns of inequality in news consumption where the revelation of news is increasingly becoming defined by the technical capital of a newsroom rather than the social topicality of the news itself. In this analysis, the paper will attempt to

identify the emerging issues of the professional responsibility and editorial sovereignty in the transforming digital age in Pakistan.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The second type of radical change affecting journalism is the rapid implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is not only a technological solution, but a change in the way news is produced, received, and distributed. Even though AI-based automation and big-data analytics enable news organizations to deliver news thousands of times faster and to reach a wider audience than ever previously, it also challenges the traditional values of editorial integrity. The point is that the editorial discretion of human nature is substituted by an algorithmic justification and it turns out to be a serious menace to the very principles of the journalism, accuracy, fairness, and promotion of the people interest (Diakopoulos, 2019).

In the past, the flow of information was controlled by the Gatekeeping Theory that placed the journalists and editors in the role of the social arbiters of the reality. These human gatekeepers acted in accordance with professional standards, institutional ethics and cultural settings (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). But the emergence of the so-called automated gatekeeping (when algorithms dictate how visible and promoted the news is) brings a mathematical bias that tends to favor commercial interaction with the news rather than its civic significance. This new technology mediation provokes the most important questions concerning the undermining of the power of journalism, the black-boxing of the editor and editorial process (Napoli, 2014).

This is also exacerbated by an unequal digital transformation in Pakistan. Unlike Western media markets, the Pakistani newsrooms are faced with a so-called twofold pressure: they must adapt to the trend of AI, globally, but must also act within the local boundaries: the lack of the technological facilities, the lack of the local AI-based infrastructure, and the fluidity of the business regulatory context. This creates a state of asymmetrical gatekeeping whereby the local newsrooms are increasingly losing their control of their channels of distribution to the international platforms.

In the midst of these seismic changes though, there is an urgent demand of theoretical synthesis with regards to the interplay of these world algorithm forces with the specific facts of socio-political situation in Pakistan. In this paper, the author addresses this problem by explaining the conflicting nature of the arising AI skills and the problem of editorial independence. It tries to explain the new inequality in Pakistani media landscape where the news outlets are becoming increasingly reliant on their opportunities to operate around the algorithmic rankings at the expense of conventional journalistic gate keeping.

### **Scope of the Study**

In this paper, we will critically examine the Artificial Intelligence (AI) introduction process in the Pakistani media industry with a specific focus made on the specific procedure of replacing the traditional editorial control with an algorithmic mediator. The conceptual framework theory applied as underpinning of

the scope is a conceptual framework, namely the Gatekeeping Theory (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009) that was used to understand how the gates of information are being re-packaged by the automated processes of information production and distribution in the news production.

The analysis will focus on the three dimensions in the Pakistani context namely:

**a. The Editorial Dimension:** The analysis of the AI-driven solutions (e.g., automated content creation, audience analytics, etc.) changing the traditional balance of powers in the newsroom decision-making process and the human editor as a professional authority.

**b. Structural Dimension:** A article on the Visibility Hole that is produced by prioritizing platforms. This involves critique of the impacts of the form of engagement measures that are imposed by the international technological platforms on the provision of local and regional news in Pakistan.

**c. The Ethical Dimension:** An essay on the dilemma of not losing its accuracy, transparency and editorial sovereignty in an area where a more probable result is a situation where the utilization of technology surpasses local control and systems of professionalization.

The situation of the discussion within the Pakistani media system to some extent allows the research to overcome the AI journalism literature that is dominated by the West. It also seeks to offer the solution to the specific issues with the so-called developing media systems wherein the digital transition is marked by the extreme reliance on the imported technology and uneven distribution of resources. The purpose of the scope of the study is hence to give background theoretical framework of the interaction between technological innovation, algorithmic gatekeeping and long term sustainability of independent journalism in Pakistan.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Though this paper provides a conceptually rigid framework of the interpretation of the intersection of AI and journalism in Pakistan, there are several limitations to the study that should be mentioned.

One of them is a constructive and qualitative synthesis of the study, which does not provide a quantitative report of the AI adoption rates within the Pakistani media industry. The heterogeneity of the industry (it is represented by both high-resource nationwide conglomerates and under-funded regional stores) presupposes that the digital divide that is taken into account in this paper may have a different form, depending on the particular organizational structures and the budgetary funds. Hence the theoretical conclusions to be drawn in the case are meant to trace the rough classifications of the structures as opposed to conducting an enumerate of technological integration statistically.

Second, the analysis has been mostly enriched by the Gatekeeping Theory. Although this model is vital in explaining editorial control and flow of information, it might not include all the macroeconomic or geopolitical variables that affect global AI supply chain. Future studies may consider incorporating Political Economy

of Communication or Mediatization Theory to help develop how global capital and international regulatory pressures are directly influential in determining the technological decisions of Pakistani newsrooms.

Third, the implementation of AI in Pakistani setting is a developing and new process. It is possible that some of the technical notes concerning platform prioritization will change because of the fast rate of algorithmic changes in the global platforms (including Google and Meta). Thus, it is considered that this study is a picture of a transitional period. The fact that there is still no large-scale, longitudinal empirical evidence on AI in South Asian newsrooms, is an ongoing problem to all researchers in the field; the present paper is a theoretical prequel to the extensive empirical field research that will be undertaken when the technology is at an advanced stage.

Lastly, the paper is based on the analysis of the existing literature and professional press coverage. Although, all attempts have been made to make the insights pertinent to the Pakistani setting, the black box character of proprietary algorithms implies that much of the technical reasoning behind news dispensation is a secret. This paper recognizes the fact that until the world platforms can offer more algorithmic transparency, academic study around its effect will, by the necessity, be interpretative and critical.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and journalism has become a central issue of current media studies due to a radical change in the production, curation, and consumption of news. The features of this change include the introduction of automated news generation, automated recommendation systems, and analytical applications, into the existing journalistic processes (Diakopoulos, 2019). On the one hand, the literature recognizes the enormous affordances of AI in streamlining the newsroom, but, at the same time, it also notes a developing conflict between the optimization of the technologies and editorial independence.

### **Automated Journalism and editorial efficiency.**

Automated journalism is one of the major areas of study, and it has been defined as developing news using programmed sets of information, through automated programs without necessarily the involvement of any human being. According to Carlson (2015), more intensive uses of these systems are in international news companies that provide a feed of commodity news such as financial indices, sporting results, and weather predictions. This automation allows the newsrooms to produce more, and hypothetically, human journalists will have time to do high-important investigative journalism (Graefe, 2016). Such efficiency, though, comes at the conceptual cost, the routinization of the news, in which the subject matter of news is not selected based on social or civic necessity but rather depending on the availability of data.

### **Algorithms Bias and The Crisis of Transparency.**

The transition to AI mediated journalism poses a couple of significant ethical concerns, the most important of which is the algorithmic bias. Algorithms, as

Diakopoulos (2019) explains, are not neutral, i.e., they reflect whatever the training data they are trained on, and the commercial interests of the people who are creating it. This problem is aggravated by the absence of transparency. Lewis, Guzman, and Schmidt (2019) stress that AI is a black box that conceals the editorial processes, in general, and potentially damages media institutions credibility.

### **Reconceptualizing the Gatekeeping Theory.**

The most notable conceptualization change that has come up in the recent literature is the development of the Gatekeeping Theory. Conventionally, the concept of gatekeeping meant a process of choice and exclusion undertaken by the individual editors and subject to newsroom practices (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). This model has been extended by the introduction of AI as what Napoli (2014) explains as an Algorithmic Gatekeeping.

This contemporary paradigm does not just see the human agents take control of the gate. Social media channels and recommendation engines are instead secondary gatekeepers, which dictate the visibility and popularity of news content by using measures of engagement. The multi-level framework proposed by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) that considers individual, routine, organizational, and social influences needs to be now supplemented with technological level, in which code and data have the same impact as a senior editor on determining the flow of information.

### **Digital Divide of Developing Media Systems.**

Most of the scholarly literature on AI in the media is concerned with the Western-based newsrooms, however, there is now a growing amount of literature on AI in situational conditions that can be described as developing or emerging in media. The use of digital tools to journalize and analyze data, as well as to engage their audience, is a recent and notable phenomenon in Pakistan (Abbas and Raza, 2021). Nonetheless, the literature also points out one structural imbalance peculiar to the newsrooms across South Asian countries: the issue of embracing AI with the confines of unsophisticated technological backdrop, financial uncertainties, and the absence of native verbal content to train AI.

Thus, the Future of Journalism in Pakistan is not only a technological issue, but also an issue of structural survival. Researchers say that the dependence on the international platforms to deliver news exposes the Pakistani media to a kind of technological dependency where national news presence is dictated by foreign-based algorithmic interests (Thussu, 2018).

### **Research Gap**

Even though the academic research on the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its application in journalism is growing, much of the literature is still geographically and conceptually provincial. The existing studies are mostly focused on the developed systems of media and the news organizations of large scale international markets (Diakopoulos, 2019; Carlson, 2015). Although these researches provide the much needed information on the efficiency of newsrooms and automated reporting, they are usually based on the socio-economic steadiness and technological platforms of the west. They, therefore, do not consider the socio-

technical peculiarities of the processes of developing media systems, as AI implementation is subject to various economic pressures and regulation gaps.

Pakistan in particular and South Asian in general, there is an analytical vacuum. Although the Pakistani newsrooms are experimenting with digital tools of data analytics and content distribution (Abbas and Raza, 2021), the academic reaction has been more of a description, not of a theoretical nature. The research that goes beyond just observing the phenomenon of technological change and critiquing its impact on the editorial power relations is severely lacking. The present lack of a local theoretical context translates to the fact that the ethical and professional implications of AI in Pakistan are being assessed through the Western prism that might not reflect the country in its linguistic, political, and infrastructural contexts.

In addition, although the Gatekeeping Theory has been reworked to incorporate algorithmic gatekeeping, there is still a significant knowledge gap as to the hybridity of the gate in new markets.

In such a way, it attempts to shift the scholarly conversation towards one where there is a general discussion of the efficiency of AI to that of news inequality and editorial sovereignty in the Global South.

#### **Theoretical Framework: How to make a Human Gatekeeping Algorithmic.**

This research is theoretically based on the Gatekeeping Theory which is the cornerstone in the study of communication that proposes how information is chosen, filtered, and framed into news (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). In the past, this theory placed journalists and editors in the role of the social arbiters of reality, whose professional judgment determines which events should be filtered across the gates of the newsroom to make it to the public. Included in these decisions was the established news values, institutional policies, and professional ethics thus making the flow of information a man-centered activity.

#### **The Algorithmic Turn of Gatekeeping.**

An incorporation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has prompted the need to transform this classic model into what is currently known as Algorithmic Gatekeeping. Within the modern digital ecosystem, the processes of selection and prioritization are more and more automated, meaning that machine learning and predictive analytics are doing the job of human editors (Diakopoulos, 2019). In comparison to human gatekeepers that work based on qualitative editorial intuition, algorithmic gatekeepers work based on quantitative measures of engagement. This change brings in a new level of computation in the gatekeeping mechanism, with the news visibility being assigned with the help of data-driven logic instead of social or civic interest (Napoli, 2014).

#### **The Hybridity of the Gate**

This paper assumes a Hybrid Model of Gatekeeping, according to which AI does not substitute the human editor but instead restructures the surroundings under which they operate. In this bi-polar system it is the human editor who is charged with the creation of the content and the algorithm that more and more dictates the distribution and hierarchy of this content. Extending the multi-level model of

Shoemaker and Vos (2009), we can examine how the multi-level of the gate has been a socio-technical construct with interaction between the code and conscience.

### **Theoretical Deduction to Pakistani context.**

Through this framework to discuss the Pakistani media space, one can critically discuss the Editorial Sovereignty. The Pakistani gatekeepers are asymmetrically interacting with the technology they are interacting with in a highly dependent environment on the global digital platform. The Visibility Gap in Pakistan can be explained through the theoretical perspective of the Gatekeeping Theory where Pakistani local newsrooms are compelled to reason through the Black Box of international algorithms to remain solvent.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Institutional Approach of Reflexivity.**

A reflexive institutional lens of artificial intelligence (AI) and journalistic gatekeeping of the Pakistani media ecosystem is applied in this report. Since the introduction of AI in South Asian newsrooms is a current and dynamically evolving field, it is not a significant factor the study takes into account the traditional approach of quantitative data collection, and a narrative synthesis and critically informed assessment of the practitioners is its preferred choice. It is a particular methodology that aims at tracking the shifts in editorial authority and news representation towards mass execution of empirical work.

The study design will be in such a way that the study will have three layers of enquiry in its analysis:

**a. Theoretical Integration:** The theoretical layer presupposes the implementation of the multi-level Gatekeeping Theory (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009) to the technical opportunities of the AI-powered tools. The article reveals the way the automated routines are taking root in the organization and social levels of Pakistani journalism by combining the traditional stratification of the gatekeeping with the present day, algorithmic logic.

**b. Contextual Mapping and Professional Immersion:** The phase measures the structural oddities of the Pakistani media setting, such as digital divide, language barriers of natural language processing (NLP) and financial limitations. To be more precise, it can be attributed to the fact that the author is professionally engaged and active in the journalistic networks, one of which is Karachi Press Club on which this mapping is informed. These uncritical peer consultations give the material realities of some new media system a grounded view to the romanticized idealized models of West which are mostly overlooked.

**c. Critical Synthesis of Practitioner Discourse:** This is the last level that entails synthesizing practitioner media discourse, available academic sources, and behaviors on the platform to extract any new patterns of news dissemination. In this phase, the researchers look at how platform prioritization affects public-interest journalism, including the conflict between the commercial goals of the algorithm and the democratic editorial principles.

With the help of this qualitative-reflexive design, the research will be able to offer a high-level conceptual framework of determining the ethical issues and structural inequality related to the AI transition in Pakistan. This method is especially strong in analyzing the black-box technological advances, in which the written sources of documented empirical studies are scarce, and it provides the framework of theoretical studies, both scholarly and experiential.

#### **Research Design A Qualitative-Reflexive Framework.**

This paper employs the qualitative-reflexive research design to address the issues of structure and ethics of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Pakistani newsrooms. The uniquely relevant conceptual approach is exploratory since the concept of AI integration in the Pakistani journalism industry is described by a vast insufficient number of localized empirical records (Creswell, 2014). This design can be used due to the necessity of a more comprehensive study of the systemic relationship between global technological changes and local journalistic practices by means of a wider investigation, as confirmed by a reflexive framework and not a restrictive empirical sample.

The study design goes beyond conventional ethnographic or formal interview-based research, which tends to be constrained by an inability to access proprietary newsroom algorithms. Rather, the research uses a critical synthesis of a media discourse, institutional analysis, and professional observation. This will entail an assessment of the existing trends of automated reporting and algorithmic distribution in the Pakistani media market as recorded in industry reports, academic sources as well as the informal folk theories propagated by practitioners in the professional circles such as the Karachi Press Club. This macro-level would allow the research to reveal the new trends in the news choice and editorial powers that a local case study would not allow to detect.

The design has its main point in the Gatekeeping Theory, which is used to map the point of interaction between traditional editorial decision-making and the multi-level structure of the Black Box logic of algorithmic systems. Using this theoretical perspective on the Pakistani case, the study determines the structural changes that constitute the concept of algorithmic gatekeeping, namely the reallocation of prioritization and visibility in a digital-first world. In this qualitative-reflexive design, the study creates a guidepost in the formation of the ethical issues and news inequality within the development of the Pakistani journalism.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Conceptual Analysis of Algorithmic Gatekeeping in Pakistan.**

The substitution of human-friendly editorial management with the use of algorithmic gatekeeping in Pakistan signifies a complete change in the gates through which the information flows. This discussion assesses this change in three main areas, namely, the hybridity of the newsroom, the digital divide in infrastructure, and the geopolitical ramifications of prioritizing platforms.

### **The Hybrid Model of Gatekeeping and Editorial Intuition.**

The recent tendencies in the Pakistani media industry indicate that AI is not replacing the editors, rather, it is establishing a hybrid system of gatekeeping. Here, the intuition of the journalist at the so-called individual level of the gatekeeping is more and more mediated by the so-called routine level (the metric of algorithms). The main gate has also changed as newsrooms in large cities such as Karachi and Islamabad add to the monitor of social media and audience analytics, which are done by AI, where what is socially significant is no longer in the trending, but rather algorithmically trending.

This produces a tension in the structure of journalism and the demand of high-velocity engagement by the algorithms. This is especially noticeable in the Pakistani context in the breaking news cycles, when the pace of AI-based distribution is likely to exceed the standard verification procedures that are vital to the socio-political climate of such high sensitivity as the country is. The hybrid gatekeeper has to then find a way to live in a paradox, implementing AI to continue to be seen and fix the inaccuracies that automated speed tends to generate by hand.

#### **News Inequality and Technological Caste System: Practitioner Perceptions.**

A so-called techno caste system in the Pakistani journalism is one of the most significant outcomes of this reflexive synthesis an organizational division which is frequently discussed in the back room of the Karachi Press Club. Even though large cities have well-regarded, highly-funded news providers who can access capital, which they can use to apply advanced AI so they can generate an autonomous report on the data, smaller regional or language-specific news sources have a formidable entry barricade.

a. **The Philological \Gap:** A more evident example of gap in visibility could be provided by the comparison between the performance of large sources in English language like Dawn and the smaller regional-language newspapers.

b. **Since all Natural Language Processing (NLP)** models worldwide are English (and to a smaller degree, Urdu) optimized, the local language content does not tend to trigger the markers of relevance necessary to the platform prioritization. This contributes to a systematic de-prioritization on important provincial reporting.

c. **Resource Exhaustion and "Shadowing":** In non-academic discourse, regional journalists tend to develop an impression of technological exhaustion. The need to pay to be SEO-optimized or to use AI-powered engagement analytics cannot afford to publish their stories, however interesting those may be to the public, and the global distribution algorithms will automatically filter them. These algorithms are conservative of the high traffic, data-intensive output of technologically advanced, usually Karachi or Islamabad newsrooms.

d. **The Financial Gate:** The gate in the modern Pakistani journalism is no longer necessarily editorial; it is now essentially financial. The fact that it is impossible to speak the language of the algorithm forms the second layer of inequality in news. The effect of silencing voices in the margins of the Pakistani media system is that despite being billed as the democratic spaces of the countryside, the "Black Box" fails to capture the finer points of rural reporting, as one listener of a recent Press Club meeting suggested.

e. **As a result, such technological stratification** makes sure that the transitions to digital first in Pakistan are not the expansion of democracy, but the constriction of the public space. Technological Caste System is a system that entraps the outlets in a vicious cycle of diminishing returns, as they have less visibility due to the absence of AI infrastructure and so cannot raise the required financial resources needed to fill in the gap.

#### **Priorities and Linguistic Prejudice on the Platform.**

There is an element of geopolitical filtering due to the reliance on international technology platforms (Meta, Google, X). Due to the fact that these algorithms tend to be optimized based on English-language patterns and Western metadata standards, high-quality reporting in Urdu language never tends to reach the status of trending as opposed to homogenized global news.

As an example, a comparative analysis of the headline performance on the social media platforms indicates a pattern of unequal representation of the Urdu and English languages. Articles posted in English, and frequently written in fashionable keyword-optimized and platform-friendly language, were much more likely to get much higher levels of engagement and visibility than those in Urdu, even with which they shared a media house. Urdu headlines that can be based on an idiomatic or contextual phrasing are not well indexed by platform algorithms and search engines. Consequently, the linguistic diversity of the local journalism turns out to be a drawback of the computational systems that tend to favour standardized, data-portable language forms.

This paper will claim that the linguistic bias of these systems can cause misinterpretation of the local cultural subtleties or cannot be able to classify local content appropriately. Consequently, the logic of prioritization of Silicon Valley dictates more and more the Future of Journalism in Pakistan. This leads to the erosion of editorial sovereignty in which Pakistani newsrooms will tailor their news to satisfy a foreign black box algorithm instead of addressing the particular democratic demands of Pakistani citizenry.

#### **The Moral and Legal Empty Quarter.**

The review shows that there is a major gap between adoption and regulation of technology. Compared with the attempts of the European Union to regulate AI, the Pakistani regulatory system of media (and mostly with the help of PEMRA) is still aimed at the traditional broadcasting content. Moreover, the Winner-Take-All logic of AI-based platforms implies that advertising proceeds the algorithm, which nourishes small, crucial sources of local information, at the expense of others. In the absence of a localized ethical framework and a rethought regulatory strategy, the process of automation can destroy the goodwill of the Fourth Estate in Pakistan in favor of sensationalism over sober, localized public-interest journalism.

#### **Synthesis: Striking a balance between Innovation and Integrity.**

The increased penetration of AI in Pakistan journalism shows that the balance between technological innovation and ethical responsibility should be maintained with a careful approach. As much as AI technology has practical benefits,

i.e. enhanced efficiency in data processing and a reduction in production cycles, it cannot assume normative duties of journalism.

The dynamic, in the perspective of the Gatekeeping Theory, is that even though AI is an efficient supporting device of filtering and ranking, the ultimate editorial responsibility and authority towards the population must be left to human editors. The capacity to integrate these digital tools without abandoning the core role of an independent observer of the society could define what will come to be the future viability of Pakistani press.

## **CONCLUSION of Findings:**

### **The New Architecture of Editorial Control.**

Following the conceptual evaluation of the Gatekeeping Theory within the context of Pakistani digital ecosystem, the paper unveils the existence of four significant changes in the current situation with journalism in Pakistan. These findings are the indications of a dramatic restructuring of editorial control, whereby the techno-capital is increasingly the dictator of the boundaries of the social dialog.

### **The Replacement in the Human Intuition and the Algorithms: The Phenomenon of Chasing the Trend.**

The discussion reveals that that personal level of gatekeeping which has been conventionally defined by the professional background, the news sense, and the ethical feeling of the editor is being substituted by the routine level of algorithmic indicators. The Pakistani newsrooms have turned more reactive in news selection, particularly those that are transforming their business models to a digital-first one. In accordance with the conceptual assessment of the Gatekeeping Theory in the Pakistani digital ecosystem, this paper reveals that there are four major changes that characterize the present state of journalism in Pakistan. These results reflect a serious reorganization of editorial power, with the technological capital becoming more and more the determinant of the limits of the social discourse.

**a. The Emergence of the Folk Theories and Workarounds:** When there is no openly available access to the mechanics of a platform, Pakistani journalists have theorized folk theories regarding what the Black Box desires. During informal meetings and at formal ones where editors gather, it is often talked about how to game the system, so that the headline syntax can be adjusted or the Urdu script can be posted at particular times to hit a specific high traffic window or even that sensationalist angles need to be pursued at the expense of a careful report.

**b. The Loss of Proactive Agency:** Conventional Karachi media hub was characterized by the agendas setting on the basis of civic necessity. Nevertheless, peer discussions have it that the editorial gate has now been left open to mostly content that suits predetermined algorithmic choices with respect to high velocity interaction. This is a radical change to proactive journalism (researching on what the audience should be aware of) to reactive journalism (writing what the algorithm desires to publish).

**c. Such a change is also seen in everyday newsroom cultures:** The choice of stories in some of the Pakistani digital-first newsrooms is informally guided by the

trending keywords, hashtag performance and audience engagement as demonstrated through Google trends software or other analytics software. Major political events are an example, with the editors having the desire to focus more on the stories which are trending in the search results at the expense of one that has been traditionally newsworthy.

**d. Metric-Driven Anxiety:** It has been reported by younger journalists, especially, that their work is increasingly being measured by real-time dashboards as opposed to the qualitative effect of their work. This sets the scene in which the "gatekeeper" has become not a senior editor with decades of experience, but a digital interface that will show what stories are currently trending and what should be dropped.

#### **The Evolution of so-called Hybrid Gatekeeper.**

The key finding of the synthesis is that AI has not rendered the human editor obsolete; instead, it has led to the concern of creating a hybrid job of a gatekeeper. The editor in the Pakistani case has become more of an intermediary between the old journalistic values and the technical requirements of the visibility of platforms. However, such hybridity is not symmetrical. The human journalist is the only one ethically and legally responsible despite the fact that an increasing number of functions of delivering news and prioritizing it are performed by AI systems. This creates an accountability gap in the Pakistani media in which the editors are supposed to be responsible of the outcome of the algorithmic biases or the automated errors that they have less control over.

#### **All People (Enhancing Structural Inequality): The Dualized Landscape.**

The paper concludes that the use of AI is growing at a rate which is leading to a drastic dichotomy of the Pakistani media sphere and the creation of two segments of information providers:

**Tier 1 (The Technologically Elite):** Urban and extremely large media organizations possessing the funds to invest in proprietary SEO gear and information scientists and AI-powered analytics. The optimization to the algorithm is something such organizations are able to afford, and therefore, conquers the digital world and captures the majority of the revenue created by the platform.

**Tier 2 (The Digitally Marginalized):** Regional, local, and Urdu-language outlets which lack the financial capacity to adopt AI.

This divide is big enough that, Future of Journalism in Pakistan is becoming a small group of people, one after another. As the algorithms prioritize information-rich and technologically streamlined content, the voices of the region Pakistan have a risk of being silenced not through some sort of conventional censorship, but through the invisibility of the algorithm.

#### **Black Box Dependency and Loss of Agency.**

Lastly, the research pinpoints a growing and threatening reliance upon non local proprietary technologies. The Pakistani newsrooms are technically functioning in the Black Boxes of the world technological giants. The opaque nature of the internal logic of these algorithms and its dependence on the commercial interests of the Silicon Valley places the Pakistani media houses in a condition of continual

accommodation. This reliance restricts the capability of the Pakistani media to act as an autonomous Fourth Estate; the scope and influence are eventually restricted by the influence of external, commercially specific code and not the national or local common good.

## CONCLUSION

The proposed study, based on the developed Gatekeeping Theory, shows that the classical human-centric editorial model is being replaced by the hybrid socio-technical architecture. As much as journalists and editors continue to be the moral center of the newsroom, their authority is more and more bounded by the quantitative logic of algorithmic systems which focus more on engagement than civic relevance.

The overall idea presented in this study is that although AI has been developed to offer numerous affordances to the newsroom and data processing, they are unevenly spread throughout the Pakistani media environment. This leads to the creation of a technological caste system in which a small number of elite-based media houses can have access to AI to speak the language of the algorithm and the regional and Urdu-based outlets are increasingly at risk of algorithmic invisibility.

Due to increased reliance of Pakistani newsrooms on worldwide, proprietary, and "black box" content distribution systems, the ability to shape national agenda is being outsourced to third party commercial interests. The resulting accountability gap, in which the editors are criticized as the cause of the distribution patterns which they no longer have control over, requires an immediate redefinition of the local regulation systems and ethics at the professional level.

After all, it is the capacity of the press to preserve a Human-in-the-Loop model that preserves the normative values of accuracy, fairness and the interest of the people that will determine the future of journalism in Pakistan. The concept of technological innovation should be accompanied by a dedication to the transparency of algorithms and the denial of the metrics that are based entirely on engagement. It is possible to transform the Pakistani media into a localized, ethical, and theoretically-based response to AI without sacrificing its basic function as a sovereign and independent Fourth Estate in the digital era.

The patterns that are traced in this work are not some theoretical ones. Already, visible differences in the visibility of platforms, language performance, and newsroom decision-making practices point to the fact that the algorithmic gatekeeping is already reorganizing the news production hierarchy in Pakistan. These are only precursors that indicate that without any intervention, the new digital ecosystem risks merging informational power instead of making it democratic.

**Recommendations to the Future: Empowering the Fourth Estate.**

It is important to note that on the basis of the conceptual analysis of algorithmic gatekeeping in Pakistan, the following recommendations can be offered to the media practitioners, policy-makers, and academic researches:

**Setting up Localized Ethical and Algorithms.**

Pakistani media companies should go beyond internationalized generic standards of ethics to come up with contextual ethical principles of AI. Such frameworks must enforce algorithmic transparency whereby content that is produced by automated systems, ranked, or given priority by automated systems should be disclosed by newsrooms. Moreover, editorial policies should specify the requirement of the Human-in-the-Loop, and manual verification of the automated outputs must be implied to avoid the enhancement of the local socio-political predispositions or language errors (Diakopoulos, 2019).

#### **Filling the Technological Caste System.**

The collaborative technological investment will be an urgent step towards avoiding the continued marginalization of the regional and independent news. The industry agencies and the global media development agencies must assist in the establishment of common AI systems instead of leaving its implementation to the big capitalized media conglomerates. This involves the creation of open-source and Urdu-language Natural Language Processing (NLP) systems and local data archives that can be used by smaller outlets to ensure staying visible in global platform algorithms.

#### **Pedagogical change in Journalism Education.**

The professional competencies of the hybrid gatekeeper role are different. In Pakistan, the journalism programs should be revised to introduce Algorithmic Literacy and Data Ethics to the existing reporting skills. The journalists should be empowered by the training programs to not only use AI tools, but also to audit them critically. According to Pavlik (2013), this is aimed at combining the technological fluency with the normative values of the profession that are characterized by the investigative rigor and critical inquiry.

#### **Digital Sovereignty and Regulatory Reform.**

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and other relevant digital rights authorities should increase their reach to appeal to the logic of prioritization of platforms. The rules and regulations must make the global techs more transparent on their distribution algorithms within the South Asian market. This would assist in overcoming the so-called geopolitical filtering which nowadays cripples local news and make sure that the future of journalism in Pakistan is dictated by the national public-interest considerations instead of commercial interests of foreign technology companies.

#### **Conceptual Foundation to Longitudinal Empirical Inquiry.**

Lastly, even though the present study offers a requisite conceptual background, there is an imperative of shifting the current qualitative-reflexive grounding to a longitudinal field research. The practitioner-informed knowledge collected by immersion into the Karachi Press Club could be considered an important record of a systemic shift in the system, but this data has to be confirmed in long-term empirical follow-up.

The future research must not stick to the snapshot approach but utilize the following methodologies to quantify the long-term effects of AI on the Pakistani public sphere:

- a. **Comparative Ethnography:** The researchers must perform deep-dive ethnographic research in both of Tier 1 (Technologically Elite) and Tier 2 (Digitally Marginalized) newsrooms in order to monitor the emergence of algorithmic folk theories and reactive logic into a formal organizational policy.
- b. **Quantitative Content Analysis:** It is urgently required that the gap in diversity with time be measured. Based on the analysis of the presence of regional language content (Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi) and English-language optimization of the content in SEO, the scholars will be able to measure the scale of the so-called Technological Caste System.
- c. **Audience Trust Metrics:** Future research should be done to understand whether the transition to machine-generated engagement logic and the end of human-centric editorial instincts undermines the credibility of the press in the eyes of the Pakistani people, who might become more eager to develop a sense of algorithmic sensationalism.

The academic community can contribute better to the sustainability of editorial sovereignty by filling the gap between the existing professional observations and the rigorous longitudinal data. The insight into the development of algorithmic gatekeeping is not only the requirement of a theoretical nature, but it is also the key to protecting the social responsibility of the press in the more automated information space in Pakistan.

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