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## WHY CRIMINOLOGISTS STUDY JOURNALISM?

**Dr Suhail Ansari**

*Assistant Professor, School of Media and Communication Studies,  
Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad*

**Hassan Latif Shaikh**

*Lecturer, Department of Criminology, University of Sindh Jamshoro*

**Rameez Ali Mahesar**

*Teaching Assistant, School of Media Communication Studies,  
Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad*

### ABSTRACT

*'Media is situated within, and fully interwoven with, many other social practices, to the extent where crime and media representations are inseparable'. Criminologist must, however, be alert to the ways in which media create perceptions in order to understand that things are not as always as they are presented. Criminologist has to be a well-versed scholar on the subject of media practices to tread fuzzy area between the news and propaganda and to identify the instances of media coverage of crime as the major culprit for the increase in crime through its redefinition; and for the increase in pessimism through projecting only dark things in much darker light as good news is bad news for media.*

*Awareness of media practices helps criminologist to understand the reasons for separate feeds so can be used for different content of several newspapers to realize truth; and to understand the failure of media to publicize moral dilemma because of its failure to offer rational and duly informed societal response. Criminologist is to be media scholar to know that news is not necessarily about events those transcend crimes and there does exist the stand-off between moral panic and realism and separation of cause and effect and the addition of newness to news and exceptionalization of crime; and crime representation can be for the marginalization of some groups.*

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**Keywords:** Propaganda, Good news, Separate feeds, Moral panic, Realism

### INTRODUCTION

Cultural, social and historical factors do affect the way people negotiate with facts; encounter between media text and audience does occur within cultural and social context. Consumers are not lab rats; audience have unique identity and characteristics; media, therefore, cannot produce copycat behavior; facts, however are pre-packaged and realities are calibrated and happenings are chosen to ignore or highlight so that media can manipulate general consciousness despite the guiding influence of cultural and social norms. This manipulation is dictated by the policy of newspapers to help

achieve the increase in circulation by ‘protecting social biases and cultural serotypes’ (Pearson, 1983) newspapers consider important to serve vested interest.

Media cannot produce copycat behavior; however, there are always vulnerable susceptible to ‘a one-off media incident regardless of the wider context of a lifetime of meaning making (Boyd, Barrett, 2002). Incidents are not simply reported as they occur to be, media embellish the details of the incident of rapes in a way that readers feel sensationally inclined to it and glamorize the killing in a way that reader feel inclined to identify with perpetrator. Every consumer of the graphic details of ‘bad incident’ of society feels the same but vulnerable in actuality commit things they feel inclined to it.

Media advance crime to advance itself and consequently the discourse that follows reflects grief and concern for the world increasingly filled by individuals of corroded moral standards bent on subverting consensual codes. Criminologist can identify media coverage of crime as the major culprit for the increase in crime and making society pessimist to itself. Criminologist must understand that glamorization restructures public perception and its consequences to understand that media in publicizing crime do perform its social function; however, embellishment of information redefines the social boundaries of crime as crime does not seem then a thing one refrains from but a thing one commit to prove one’s gallantry and chivalry.

#### **NEWS AND CRIME**

Indeed, crime news focuses on criminals much more than on victim. The authentic attractions or sneaky thrills of committing high-risk violent crime; crime, therefore, is not about acquisition, materialism or economic need, but about person, status, dominance and daring’ (Katz, 1990). Criminologist can help media understand that work of media is to reinforce consensual values, therefore; in providing context and information to an audience, it must portray event in a way that it is conceptualized within the existing paradigm and depiction of happenings unite audience in their sense of moral rightness.

Criminologist can help media understand that its articulation of crimes must make crime visible threat to values; and it should celebrate success of social control measures to reinforce social values. Criminologist can promote the danger of the glamorization of criminal acts as glamorization makes these acts beautifully visible; therefore, audience feel like lamenting instead of celebrating the social control measures.

#### **SCOPE OF STUDY**

This study does not intend to examine the conception underlying hypodermic syringe model that ‘media through mechanistic and sophisticated

process administer an injection of values and norms into its passive recipients' (Osborne, R., 1995) rather believes media do and examines its effects and gives understanding for inoculation and suggests the role criminologist can play to offset them. This article does not expand on the criticism on reducing the pattern of human attitude to single factor because of the denial of the network of mediating impact on attitude formation.

This study does not go with the opinion that media portrayals don't worth considerable attention as they cause only immediate response to their content; and therefore, fail to have the long-term effects; it goes contrary to approach that urges to find explanation for the interpretation of reality in the cultural, social and historical reasons instead of isolating media from cultural context for the sake of making it a convenient scapegoat; and examines the effects of the cumulative effects of immediate responses as they in the long run contribute to perception-formation of reality.

The construction of context is an art as the relationship between stimulus and responses depend entirely on it (*Ibid*). Media construct context to experience panic for social and cultural developments; threatening in their impact on well-entrenched modes of cultural and social life and causing changes in some lesser important aspects of life (such as habits of eating and dress) those have the potential of causing damaging psychological affects and creating pernicious social consequences. This construction creates panic, and media tap feelings of uncertainty and apprehension to impart a boost to sale. Things do not end here; the very media offers reassurance and direction so to maintain its circulation.

Criminologist must understand that newspapers provide separate feeds as predilection, taste and preference of readers determine the content of news (*Ibid*); therefore, coverage of event should be seen in accordance to readership. Reporting of event is sensationalized, if readers are inclined to see drama in every happening and not further from truth if readers are enlightened. It is important for criminologist to know truth through the media of serious readership; however, examining media of non-serious audience has educational value as criminologist learn that how drama is created from facts and understand the formation of this attitude because of such coverage.

'News in some form from reflects society. It is mirror of society' (Tuchman, 1978). Examining media of non-serious audience helps criminologist understands that drama is created from facts so to understand that exaggerated and sensational coverage of things does not mirror society; but how consumers (of non-serious media) want things to be portrayed.

**Good News is Bad News:** Good news is bad news for media; because good news does not sell newspaper (Osborne, 1995). The choice is motivated by commercial concern and has serious cultural and social consequences. Media paint world in the black corner; society appears to be governed by

evil, society is devoid of good people; good acts either do not exist or even do they are not worth mentioning: consumers in consequence feel like to do as Romans do.

Media is not interested in a good story to become known as it does not sell newspaper; therefore, good news is buried in the midst of the avalanche of bad news; worse good news are just out rightly ignored.

Criminologist must understand that picture media present of a society may not be partially true but it is definitely not the whole truth. The selective coverage projects the sordid aspects of a society; but as focus is exclusive, consumers feel that projected aspect is the only aspect. Criminologist must not rely on news coverage to follow trends in a society; the whole picture can be taken by reading the section in newspapers such as health or education related activities in the special addition of newspapers or can visit the website of universities and organizations to get updates about the healthy activities and positive developments in society.

**Fuzzy Area Between the News & Propaganda:** Criminologist must understand that media does not report on the news; 'media shape it to present particular views. Media do not obey the bound that requires telling all sides of a story (Sherizen, 1978), thus end up representing a one-sided pseudo propaganda piece. Media is governed by conflicting interests; some media weigh in on one side of the situation; while some in other; therefore, cannot have any balanced reporting; however, criminologist can balance his judgment by reading newspaper weigh on opposite side of situation so to walk to fuzzy area between the news and propaganda.

**Event and Newspapers:** Crime is an event if it is of significant magnitude, it is to be reported as it is too important to ignore or in other words its denial is not possible; but the problem is that event is same but newspapers are different.

If crime is reported as it happens, newspaper will appear same; therefore, each newspaper has its own details and reasons for crime. Each newspaper has its own policy and its own readers; therefore, reporting is in accordance to dictates of the policy of newspaper and to the taste and predilection of reader. Pro-religious and pro-secular see crime differently and that accounts for the sanitized or exaggerated version. Decorated details unleash the intended wrath and diluted version render society oblivious to its gravity; two people of opposite sex; for example, are on date; excess during dating occur.

Pro-religious tailor its reporting (of these excess) to pander to the extremism of ultra-religious readership; while pro-secular gives version so sanitized that things look normal happening not the violation of Islamic norms. Criminologist can understand the consequence of tailoring news to readers manifested in the failure of media to publicize moral dilemma; media

in consequence fail to offer rational and duly informed societal response and hence, fail to perform its vital social function (Young, 1981).

**Events and Crimes:** Happenings are to be of dramatic nature to become news. Every crime news is about crime but every crime is not news. Journalists 'select crimes those are usually more shocking than significant' (Ibid). Crimes are selected not because they call attention to social ills but because they are sensational departure from normal and acceptable. One can read about crimes those are indicators of something wrong with social and cultural values only if they are of shocking nature, criminologist must understand that journalistic selectivity toward crime renders media coverage of crime unfit medium to understand crime as the indicator of wrong with social system. As criminologist has no other means than media to learn of crimes; he has to understand that 'high profile crime may be of no value and unimportant crime can be of the key to follow trends in society' (Ibid).

Crimes fall in hard news as the indicator of something wrong; but as hard news do not sell newspaper; crimes are constructed as moral panic tailored to sell newspapers. Criminologist must understand that newspapers take refuge in the safe territory of sensationalized reporting; therefore balanced and reasonable understanding of crime as the key to follow trends in society is impossible because of the faithful adherence on the part of newspaper to moral panic thesis: 'In the current context of 24-hour rolling news and audience-participation (via reality television, audience phone-ins, talk radio etc.), their observation that moral panics have ceased to be event that happen every now and then and have become the standard way of reporting news in an ever-increasing spiral of hyperbole and ridiculous rhetoric designed to grab our attention in a crowded media marketplace' (Wilkins, 1964).

**Crime Projection and Discourse of Fear:** Crime is not loathed; it is admired and coveted as media incorporates crimes as the basic and important aspect of entertainment. Media construct fear in society through its discourse of fear. Movies and dramas are dominated by crime and fear. There is the glorification of crime and proverbial hero in the end protects people through the instrument of violence. This appreciation of criminals triggers hankering for violence.

The consequences go much beyond as this promotion of fear through a discourse of fear has created symbolic feelings of something lurking in the dark and contribute to the creation of another identity: everyone is made to believe himself victim; and these feelings of being assailed and assaulted by politicians and policy-makers to promote false propaganda of national and international dangers.

The evidence strongly indicates that the false perception of crime lead to the support of voters for legislation against crime. This legislation deprives citizens of freedom and promotes weapon industry.

**Sexualisation of Crime:** Media renders crime sexual in quality or character by linking crime to the objectification of sex; thus media promotes awareness of erotic relation between men and women. The reality programs focus on crime and fighting of criminals; audience are exposed to the caricatures of bad guys and images of criminals having sexually evocative undertones hunting in forbidden zones the love, security and wealth.

**Entertainment Format:** Media creates the absence of ordinary that everything is departure from normal even the smile of a friend.

The entertainment format of media creates an openness of the adventure that lies not within the boundaries of normalcy thus recipients believe that adventure through normal and healthy means does not amount to adventure.

The entertainment format of media suspends belief as people watch everyone in movie is governed by selfish ulterior motives and have cynical tendencies. A kind of paranoia and scepticism imbue every facet of society.

People thus are part of society in which every one suspect other and often this suspension translate into crime as one mistaken in belief takes upon other.

**Crime Projection at the Cost of Important Issues:** Crime sells well thus hard issues such as diseases, poverty, joblessness is not featured in media or not featured significantly.

Culture and arts are as well not visible; just suspects and criminals are heroes of dramas and movies orientating people to different life or to see life differently.

**Crime Representation for Marginalization:** Criminologist must read different communication scholars such as McRobbie and Thornton to understand the outline of the trajectory of moral panics and read theories of labelling so to understand how moral panic works on behalf of government to elicit public approval for suppressive measures of legal and cultural control. Criminologist must understand how media cause fear of crime to create hard lines punitive attitudes by seeking stories those furnish 'readers with clear examples of right and wrong with which they could align their own world view' (Herman, E. and Chomsky, 2002). 'Criminologist must analyze the media representation of the perpetrator of moral crimes and media responses to AIDS which calls for a more sophisticated understanding of human motivations for marginalizing certain groups' (Sparks, 1992).

**Moral Panic and Realism:** Criminologist must not succumb to fear that media in informing public perceptions of crime drive society to 'collective anxiety and endless, cyclical panicness; that is much more

exaggerated than reasonable as Sparks says ‘effect of media and its lines of influence are far more complicated and multi-directional than traditionally been conceived and characterized’ (*Ibid*). Spark draws on several empirical examples, including research he conducted with Evil Girling and Lan Loader into public perceptions of fear, risk and crime in an English town to analyze how local and global influences intersect and diverge to create a multifaceted and complex picture of crime (*Ibid*).

It may have become fashionable to regard the media as purveyors of highly emotive and punitive rhetoric exploited by opportunist politicians to manipulate populist sentiment, but spark suggest that individuals will always make sense of ‘global transitions and transformations, including crime control, from within the contours of their local community. Quite simply mediatized fear of crime becomes substantially more intelligible in the light of a deeper contextual understanding of time and place. As such, any recourse to the concept of moral panic must be tempered by knowledge and understanding of blames attributed and solutions sought at a local level; thus there should not be the stand-off between moral panic and realism’ (*Ibid*).

**Selective Portrayal:** Media snub crimes because of its selectivity toward crimes. In selective portrayal of crime, media treat crimes those are tainted with mundaneness through selective portrayal. It highlights certain aspects of a crime at the expense of other in a way that consumer think that highlighted aspect is the only aspect thus fail to acquire the whole picture. Criminologist must understand the difference between one and only and tries to seek information of other aspects by reading the coverage of same crime by different channels and newspapers. Media do away the mundaneness of crime through embellishment; this spicing up of crime buries up the important aspects of crime amid exciting details; therefore, criminologist has to be on guard in reading the description of crime so not to be distracted in unearthing truth.

**Addition of Newness to News:** Journalists know from their experience that crime is predictable because of its repetitive nature; ‘it is an event of periodicity that occurs in different location with different participants. The creation of news is the art as it creates same old story with newness so that uniformity does not dilute dramatic nature of a crime that is brief and routine’ (Young, 1981). Criminologist must understand that this addition of newness so to separate fact from fiction in order to understand the things as they are, not as they are presented.

**Conspiratorial Prism:** Journalists tend to believe that there is always a sinister reason for everything that goes wrong; therefore, reporting of every stupid thing filters through a conspiratorial prism (Brown, Charles, 1965). Criminologist must understand that view of reality is distorted because of ‘journalists seeing themselves as a priestly class always on a ‘holy mission’



to uncover scandal' (Ibid). Understanding the post-Watergate mentality can help criminologist to understand that things can go wrong without any sinister reason.

**Oversimplified Media Coverage:** 'Media search for a single causal explanation for undesirable moral or social changes\_ television for the disappearance of childhood; adolescents for a suspected decline in social morality; the internet for facilitating the activities of pedophiles' – almost certainly serves to deflect attention away from other possible causes; the concentration on symptoms, rather than causes or long-term effects, leads to somewhat superficial analysis of crime and deviance and frequently negates the fact that those who commit crimes are not 'others'; they are 'us' and are of our making (Jewkes, 2004).

Criminologist must understand that journalist writings are not fully formed thesis. Journalist dealings with different concept are exploratory. Problem occurs when this difference is not taken and discussion in newspaper takes flight as fully-formed thesis. Criminologist, therefore, can as well be swayed by the journalistic tendency of focusing on symptoms instead of causes. Criminologist must not take articles in newspaper sufficient in and of itself so that they can guard against becoming media centric and reactionary and can understand that cultures are not as monolithic as presented by media.

**Separation of Cause and Effect:** Media separate cause and effect to simplify personalities and complex realities, this separation adds 'to the general perception of people fighting for the right of plebiscite or for equality and justice as the irrational outsider bent on terrorism and whose motivations are fanaticism and lust for trappings of power and wealth instead of socio-economic or geo-political' (Katz, 1990).

Separation of cause and effect leads to marginalization of communities and whose members are loathingly held by general public and to exacerbate things further 'the experiences of marginalization that such individuals commonly experience are underplayed by politicians and the media who continue to discuss individual moral responsibility as if it exists in a vacuum, somehow detached from the circumstances in which people find themselves. This leaves little room for rational attempts to understand the values, objectives and grievances of these individuals and instated reduces them to inhuman objects of hate' (Ibid).

Criminologist must be on guard against the effects of the separation of cause and effect so to see individuals as the part of a whole picture not detached from and the victimization has led them to recourse to terrorist attacks.

**Exceptionalizing Terrorism:** Criminologist must understand that 'framing of socio-cultural or political problem through the political discourse



of terrorism aims at escalating and intensifying a cultural climate of uncertainty and apprehension so that politicians exploit the fear of evil others once it is positioned within the pre-existing frame work of concern that included all areas of criminal activities; security immigration and so on. Serious offending acts of terrorism differ as terrorist attacks are exceptionalized; treated as somehow above, or different to, other types of crime and therefore requiring their own special laws.

Exceptionalizing terrorism encourages the public to distinguish between acts of terror and ordinary crime, thus generating a level of fear that is also exceptional and paving the way for militarized responses and use of emergency powers. It also makes more acceptable to a greater number of people the introduction of intensive identity verification measures, as well as sustaining a wide ranging terrorism industry and a considerable body of risk entrepreneurs. It is as people are in a perpetual state of warfare, or at least in a luminal space where a state of peace can at the same time be a state of emergency' (ZiZek, 2002).

Criminologist must acquire immunity to the fear of terrorism and help society to see things in the right perspective so that it can be in state of peace but not at the same time in a state of emergency.

## CONCLUSION

Crime and media representations have grown inseparable because of the interweaving of media with social practices. Criminologist should use media in the process of meaning-making to understand the ills of society; but a criminologist should be well-versed on the subject of media practices to understand the media- mediated perceptions to understand that things are not as always as they are presented.

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