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## Understanding Media Functions Through Belief into Action Scale: A Case of Islamabad-based Pakistani News Reporters

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**Abstract:** *The current research focused on exploring the inclination of Islamabad-based news reporters to get influenced by their religious beliefs while performing different media functions of civic, service, loyal-facilitator, disseminator-interventionist, watchdog, and infotainment as part of their professional roles. The study adopted the “Belief into Action Scale to deploy a quantitative cross-sectional survey and collected data from 310 news reporters serving in various print and electronic media organizations in the Federal Capital. The findings of the study revealed that the influence of religious beliefs varied between gender groups, with male news reporters being more influenced than their female counterparts. Similarly, older news reporters were more influenced by religious beliefs as compared to younger colleagues. Moreover, this influence also varied among the news reporters performing different media functions, with Loyal-Facilitators, Disseminator-Interventionists, and the ones who performed service and civic roles scoring higher on the variable of Religious Beliefs and Practices.*

**Key Words:** Religious Beliefs, News Reporters, Media Functions, Professional Roles, Pakistani Society

### Introduction

Religion and the history of mankind go hand in hand since the very beginning. Religious beliefs have been instrumental in shaping the personalities and behaviors of people (Agorastos et al., 2014). In the same way, media organizations and journalists also play a significant role in cultivating the behaviors of individuals through the inculcation of values and building narratives as public discourse (Nikunen, 2019). Media’s agenda-setting function influences the socio-cultural infrastructure of societies across the world (Salman et al., 2016). Since the journalists come from the same sociocultural backgrounds as is the case with other members of the same society, with their religious beliefs firmly knitted with their persona, the relationship between religion and media gives rise to an interesting debate. In a society like Pakistan, religion has a dominant influence on people’s lives (S. Abbas et al., 2018), and the journalists do not make any exception. This influence on media people (news reporters/journalists) demands critical examination and investigation as the latter ones are involved in the news processes and are prone to be susceptible of getting influenced by their religious beliefs and values.

### The Role of Media/Journalists in the Society

Media’s diverse functions play an important role in societal growth and development. The journalists, particularly the reporters, are at the heart of the media ecosystem because of information gathering and processing to shape news stories and packages and, finally, the dissemination of news content (Wilding et al., 2018). They not only gather information but also fact-check to verify the accuracy of collected information so that the news stories that they build are reliable and truthful. They conduct interviews that range from common people to celebrities and rely on a variety of resources, eyewitnesses, experts, and stakeholders during the process of information gathering. Journalists who are keen observers of situations

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and events turning around them make great storytellers because they have the firsthand information that they depict not only through their verbal expressions but also through non-verbal cues to shape discourses on various aspects of life (Robinson, [2019](#)).

## Understanding Media Functions

The news reporters, while reporting for their media organizations, perform different functions, which can be categorized as their roles. Some of these roles performed by journalists include civic, service, loyal facilitator, disseminator-interventionist, watchdog, and infotainment functions (Mellado & Lagos, [2014](#)). These media functions can be understood as:

### Civic Function

The civic function of the media further involves three sub-functions: informing the society, developing public discourse, and monitoring the government. The journalists disseminate essential information about various happenings and developments in society that may include various government and civil community activities, policies by the lawmakers, financial bills, water and electricity crises, as well as achievements and inventions by society members. Such dissemination of information by journalists shapes informed citizenry by fostering a public discourse that could build a democratic society, as media outlets provide a platform for debates and discussions with diverse critical views, exchange of ideas, and dialogue (J. Abbas et al., [2019](#)). This kind of public discourse, in turn, also helps the media to hold public institutions and officials accountable for their actions.

### Service Function

The service function of the media includes three sub-functions: community service, consumer advocacy, and public safety. The journalists engage in community service through the provision of fact-based, accurate, and truthful information to the public that can benefit the community at large. The media people become community advocates by investigating reports on public issues to help citizens make informed choices and hold the responsible accountable to garner benefits for society. Similarly, the information dissemination about public safety measures in times of natural calamities, disasters, and emergencies adds to the service function of media (Galston, [2013](#)).

### Loyal-Facilitator Function

The loyal-facilitator function of media is characterized by the promotion of national identity and highlighting positive stories by the media people and outlets. This appears to be one of the most crucial functions of media in terms of public interest of the society as the news reporters and media organizations should support and promote national identity and unity by cultivating patriotism among the society members by reporting historical milestones, national days to celebrate and observe, the achievements made by countrymen and cultural events and festivals. Similarly, the emphasis on positive stories can uplift and inspire the community and foster a sense of togetherness and pride in the nation (Dhiman, [2023](#)).

### Disseminator-Interventionist Function

The disseminator-interventionist function of media relates to the roles performed by the media people (reporters) in spreading the news and information, and intervention and advocacy for any specific cause or issue that may be of public interest and benefit, and for the sake of promoting change in the society.

### Watchdog Function

The watchdog function of media may be interpreted as keeping an extralegal check on government and public institutions and public office holders and investigating and exposing wrongdoings, abuse of power, malpractices, and corruption to benefit the society at large (Mezzera & Sial, [2010](#) Singh, [2022](#)). The watchdog function of media is appreciated for its role in protecting the rights of the citizens and building an informed bourgeoisie (Siddique & Rahman, [2017](#)).

### Infotainment Function

The infotainment function of media involves the dissemination of a blend of media contents based on entertainment and information to attract diverse audiences to the media content (Picard, 2000).

### Understanding the Influence of Religion on the Journalists

The journalists are not from Mars; they come from the public and hold similar sociocultural and religious beliefs as many others in the society do. Religion, however, is instrumental in defining the course of life, including sociocultural dimensions of individuals as well as societies. Its influence on people ranges from the personal to professional lives of the individuals. Abdulla (2018) considers religion as the centripetal force that shapes the sociocultural web of any society through its precepts on ethical codes to model an individual's life. All religions and ideologies have stressed ethics and moralities and propagated to their followers to structure their life patterns accordingly.

The influence of religious beliefs on the professional practices of journalists cannot be denied. Eshelman (2013) argues many people consider media as hostile to their religious beliefs, but a lot of professionals from the journalism field take it as an opportunity to pursue justice and mercy and a platform to do what God wants from them. Religions, be it Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or any other one, are diverse and constantly evolving, and any of the representatives of any religion, including journalists, cannot be taken as its sole representation (Mineo & Moore, 2016). Religion has a great role to play in journalists' lives and influences their professional discourse as well (Columbia Journalism Review, 2020).

### Problem Statement

Nielsen (1996) claims and describes it as unfortunate that there is a lack of foundation or research that aims to monitor the interaction of media and religion. Although many studies have been conducted that explored, discussed, debated about, and stressed the role of religion in people's daily lives, limited research is available that talks about the role of religion in an individual's professional life. There is almost no data available in terms of the influence of religious beliefs on media functions (roles) such as civic, service, loyal-facilitator, disseminator-interventionist, watchdog, and infotainment functions. The application of the "Belief into Action Scale" on these media functions can yield productive findings for future researchers.

### Significance of the Study

Investigation of the influence of religious beliefs on the media functions (roles) performed by the journalists (news reporters) serving various media organizations in Pakistan is important since civic, service, loyal-facilitator, disseminator-interventionist, watchdog, and infotainment functions attributed to media setups and people are important to be understood. This study will help understand the influence of religious beliefs on the various media functions and add to the existing body of literature.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the extent to which religious beliefs influence media functions performed by journalists in Pakistan
2. To measure differences among the groups of journalists performing different media functions in terms of the influence of religious beliefs

### Methodology

This cross-sectional research adopted a quantitative approach to investigate the influence of religious beliefs on media functions performed by journalists (news reporters) through a survey design. The study population comprised Islamabad-based news reporters working with various print and electronic media organizations. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique and approached 435 news reporters for data collection. A number of 310 members of the population gave consent to be part of this study. The study considered the demographic characteristics of gender and age. Gender was categorized into two groups: male and female. Age was divided into three groups: 21-30 years, 31-40 years, and 41-50 years. This study measured the inclination of the news reporters to get influenced by the religious beliefs they held while



performing various media functions like civic, service, loyal-facilitator, disseminator-interventionist, watchdog, and infotainment by considering “Belief into Action Scale” as developed and validated by Koenig et al. (2015). The study considered the variable of Religious Beliefs and Practices to interpret and apply the “Belief into Action Scale.”

## The Study Hypotheses

The current research considered the following four hypotheses:

- H<sub>1</sub>:** The influence of religious beliefs varies among male and female news reporters while performing different media functions.
- H<sub>2</sub>:** The influence of religious beliefs varies among various age groups of news reporters while performing different media functions.
- H<sub>3</sub>:** The influence of religious beliefs varies among different groups of news reporters, performing the media functions of civic, service, loyal-facilitator, disseminator-interventionist, watchdog, and infotainment.

## Data Analysis & Discussion

**Table 1**

Reliability analysis of the “belief into action scale” (n=310)

	No of items	Range				
		( $\alpha$ )	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Belief into Action Scale	10	.89	51.54	15.34	28	71

Table 1 depicts the reliability of the “Belief into Action Scale” with a Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value of .89. This reliability value is interpreted as very good. Besides the reliability value, the table above also demonstrates the mean and standard deviation along with minimum and maximum ranges for the scale adopted by the study.

**Table 2**

Frequencies and percentages of the demographic characteristics of the sample (n=310)

Demographic Characteristics	Categories	(f)	(%)
Age of the Journalist	26-35 Years	151	48.7
	36-45 Years	98	31.6
	46-55 Years	61	19.7
Gender of the Journalist	Male	204	65.8
	Female	106	34.2
Media Functions	Civic	61	19.7
	Service	33	10.6
	Loyal-Facilitator	50	16.1
	Disseminator-interventionist	31	10.0
	Watchdog	57	18.4
	Infotainment	78	25.2

Table 2 describes frequencies and percentages of the demographic characteristics of the sample under study. While calculating data on the age of the respondents, 151 out of 310 respondents fell between 26 and 35 years of age, which accounted for 48.7% of the total sample. Similarly, another 98 (31.6%) respondents were between 36-45 years of age. Another 61 (19.7%), the last category of the respondents, were between 46-55 years of age. Likewise, 204 out of the 310 respondents comprised male news reporters, whereas another 106 of them were females. In terms of media functions performed by the respondents, 78 (25.2%) comprised the largest respondent category of study participants who chose infotainment as the dominant media function performed by them, followed by another 61 (19.7%) respondents who picked civic function of media. Additionally, 57 (18.4%) respondents voiced to be performing the watchdog role of media. Moreover, 50 (16.1%) of the respondents claimed to be loyal loyal-facilitators, followed by 33 (10.6%)

journalists performing service and another 31 (10.0%) executing disseminator-interventionist roles respectively.

**Table 3**

*t*-test analysis between male and female cases on the variable of religious beliefs & practices (n=310).

Measures	Male (n=204)		Female (n=106)		t	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Religious Beliefs & Practices	58.06	14.12	43.63	11.90	-9.21	.00	-20.01	-13.12	1.14

Table 3 above reflected the application of independent sample *t*-test analysis to understand any potential differences among the male and female gender groups of the sample under study of getting influenced by religious beliefs while performing various media functions. The statistics above indicated significant statistical differences among the male and female news reporters in the context of media functions as interpreted under the umbrella of the “Belief into Action Scale. It was found that the news reporters (M=58.06, SD=14.12) scored higher than their female counterparts (M=43.63, SD=11.90).

**Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>):** The influence of religious beliefs varies among male and female news reporters while performing different media functions

As per the discussion on independent sample *t*-test, performed and demonstrated in Table 1.3, Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>) of the study has been supported as significant statistical differences are evident from the data. Hence, the study also concluded that male news reporters were more influenced by the religious beliefs they held as compared to their female counterparts.

**Table 4**

One-way ANOVA among age groups of the news reporters on the variable of religious beliefs & practices (n=310).

Variables	26-35 (n=151)		36-45 (n=98)		46-55 (n=61)		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Religious Beliefs & Practices	45.98	15.87	53.18	15.97	66.02	5.96	36.03	.00

**Table 4 (a)**

Post-hoc analysis between age groups of the news reporters on the variable of religious beliefs & practices (n=310)

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
26-35 years	36-45 years	-8.03*	1.89	-11.94	-3.07
	46-55 years	-18.83*	2.21	-25.15	-13.91
36-45 years	46-55 years	-12.00*	2.57	-18.11	-5.80

Note: P<.01

Tables 4 and 4(a) described the application of One-way ANOVA followed by post-hoc Analysis to measure potentially significant statistical differences between three age groups of the sample under study (Group 1: 26-35; Group 2: 36-45; Group 3: 46-55 years) about getting influenced by the religious beliefs while performing various media functions on the variable of Religious Beliefs & Practices. The statistics revealed differences between the 26-35 years age group (M=45.98, SD=15.87) and 36-45 years of age group (M=53.18, SD=15.97) to find out that the older age group news reporters (36-45 years) got more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the younger age group (26-35 years). The data also explored such differences between the 26-35 years of age group (M=45.98, SD=15.87) and 46-55 years of age group (M=66.02, SD=5.96) to reveal that the older age group news reporters (46-55 years) were more influenced by the religious beliefs held by the respondents as compared to the younger age group (26-35 years). Moreover, a similar trend of significant statistical differences was also found between 36-45 years of age group (M=53.18, SD=15.97) and 46-55 years of age group (M=66.02, SD=5.96) to explore that the older age





group news reporters (46–55 years) were more influenced by the religious beliefs held by the respondents as compared to the younger age group (36–45 years).

**Hypothesis 2 (H<sub>2</sub>):** The influence of religious beliefs varies among various age groups of news reporters while performing different media functions.

As the revealed discussion on One-way ANOVA coupled with Post-hoc Analysis, performed and demonstrated in Tables 1.4 and 1.4(a), Hypothesis 2 (H<sub>2</sub>) of the study has been supported as significant statistical differences are evident from the data between the age groups considered by this study. The finding revealed these differences between the group of news reporters aged 26–35 years and the groups of their colleagues falling in the age groups of 36–45 years and 46–55 years, respectively. Such differences were also evident between the group of news reporters falling in the 36–45 years age group and the ones who fell in the 46–55 years age bracket. The findings also suggested that the journalists with increasing age were more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to their younger counterparts.

**Table 5**

One-way ANOVA among media functions groups of the news reporters on the variable of religious beliefs & practices (n=310)

Variable	Civic (61)		Service (33)		Loyal Facilitator (50)		Disseminator-interventionist (31)		Watchdog (57)		Infotainment (78)		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
RBP	57.49	7.56	64.97	6.06	69.98	7.02	68.29	5.46	43.87	11.36	31.44	5.23	372.03	.00

Note. \*\*p<0.01 RBP= Religious Beliefs & Practices

**Table 5(a)**

Post-hoc analysis between media functions groups of news reporters on the variable of religious Beliefs & practices (n=310)

(I) Professional role	(J) Professional role	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Civic	Service	-7.48*	1.30	-11.22	-3.74
	Loyal-Facilitator	-12.49*	1.15	-15.79	-9.19
	Disseminator-interventionist	-10.79*	1.33	-14.62	-6.98
	Watchdog	13.62*	1.17	10.26	16.98
	Infotainment	26.06*	1.03	23.10	29.02
Service	Loyal-Facilitator	-5.01*	1.35	-8.89	-1.13
	Watchdog	21.09*	1.37	17.17	25.03
	Infotainment	33.53*	1.25	29.94	37.13
Loyal-Facilitator	Watchdog	26.11*	1.23	22.59	29.63
	Infotainment	38.54*	1.09	35.41	41.68
Disseminator-interventionist	Watchdog	24.42*	1.39	20.41	28.42
	Infotainment	36.85*	1.28	33.18	40.53
Watchdog	Infotainment	12.44*	1.11	9.24	15.63

Tables 5 and 5(a) explained the application of One-way ANOVA followed by Post-hoc Analysis to measure potentially significant statistical differences between six groups of the sample under study (Group 1: Civic; Group 2: Service, Group 3: Loyal-Facilitator, Group 4: Disseminator-Interventionist, Group 5: Watchdog, Group 6: Infotainment) in terms of media functions performed by the news reporters about getting influenced by the religious beliefs on the variable of Religious Beliefs & Practices. The study found statistically significant differences between the group of news reporters performing Civic function (M=57.49, SD=7.56) of media with the groups of journalists performing Loyal-Facilitator (M=69.98, SD=7.02), Disseminator-Interventionist (M=68.29, SD=5.46), Watchdog (M=43.87, SD=11.36), Infotainment (M=31.44, SD=5.23) functions of media. These statistics revealed that the group of news reporters performing the Civic function of media was less influenced by their religious beliefs while performing their professional roles as compared to the groups of news reporters carrying out Loyal-Facilitator and Disseminator-Interventionist functions of media. However, the group of news reporters

performing the Civic function of media was more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the groups of news reporters who undertook Watchdog and Infotainment media functions.

Similar statistical differences were also revealed between the group of news reporters who performed the Service function ( $M=64.97$ ,  $SD=7.56$ ) of media and the groups of news reporters who carried out Loyal-Facilitator ( $M=69.98$ ,  $SD=7.02$ ), Watchdog ( $M=43.87$ ,  $SD=11.36$ ), and Infotainment ( $M=31.44$ ,  $SD=5.23$ ) media functions. This data revealed that the group of news reporters who performed the Service function of media were less influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the group of news reporters who accomplished the Loyal-Facilitator function of media. This group of news reporters, however, was more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the groups of news reporters who undertook watchdog and infotainment functions of media. Moreover, the findings also revealed such differences between the group of news reporters who performed the Loyal-Facilitator ( $M=69.98$ ,  $SD=7.02$ ) function of media and the groups of news reporters who undertook Watchdog ( $M=43.87$ ,  $SD=11.36$ ) and Infotainment ( $M=31.44$ ,  $SD=5.23$ ) media functions. These statistics revealed that the group of news reporters performing the Loyal-Facilitator function of media were more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the groups of news reporters who accomplished Watchdog and Infotainment media functions.

The findings also explored significant statistical differences between the group of news reporters who performed Disseminator-Interventionist ( $M=68.29$ ,  $SD=5.46$ ) function of media and the groups of their counterparts who undertook Watchdog ( $M=43.87$ ,  $SD=11.36$ ) and Infotainment ( $M=31.44$ ,  $SD=5.23$ ) media functions to reveal that the former group of news reporters was more inclined to be influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to both of the latter groups carrying out Watchdog and Infotainment media functions. Lastly, the data also revealed significant statistical differences between the group of news reporters who undertook the Watchdog ( $M=43.87$ ,  $SD=11.36$ ) function of media and the ones who carried out the Infotainment ( $M=31.44$ ,  $SD=5.23$ ) media function. This difference suggested that the news reporters who accomplished the Watchdog media function were more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to those who performed the infotainment function of media.

**Hypothesis 3 (H<sub>3</sub>):** The influence of religious beliefs varies among different groups of news reporters, performing the media functions of civic, service, loyal-facilitator, disseminator-interventionist, watchdog, and infotainment.

As per the data reflected in Tables 1.5 and 1.5(a) and a subsequent explanation of the One-way ANOVA coupled with Post-hoc Analysis tests applied, Hypothesis 3 (H<sub>3</sub>) of the study has been supported as significant statistical differences were found between various media functions groups considered by this study. The study found statistically significant differences between the group of news reporters performing the Civic function of media and the groups of journalists performing the Loyal-Facilitator, Disseminator-Interventionist, Watchdog, and Infotainment functions of media. Similarly, such differences were also found between the group of news reporters who performed Service functions of media and the groups of news reporters who carried out Loyal-Facilitator, Watchdog, and Infotainment media functions. Moreover, the findings also revealed such differences between the group of news reporters who performed the Loyal-Facilitator function of media and the groups of news reporters who undertook Watchdog and Infotainment media functions, respectively. Furthermore, the findings also explored significant statistical differences between the group of news reporters who performed the Disseminator-Interventionist function of media and the groups of their counterparts who undertook Watchdog and Infotainment media functions to reveal that the former group of news reporters was more inclined to be influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to both of the latter groups carrying out Watchdog and Infotainment media functions. Moreover, the data also revealed significant statistical differences between the group of news reporters who undertook the Watchdog function of media and the ones who carried out the Infotainment media function.

The results also explored that the news reporters who performed Civic functions were less inclined to get influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to other groups of news reporters carrying out Loyal-Facilitator and Disseminator-Interventionist functions of media. However, the same news reporters were more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the groups of news reporters who undertook Watchdog and Infotainment media functions. Similarly, the news reporters who performed the Service function of media were less influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the group of news reporters



who accomplished the Loyal-Facilitator function of media. This group of news reporters, however, was more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the groups of news reporters who undertook watchdog and infotainment functions of media. Moreover, the news reporters performing the Loyal-Facilitator function of media were more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to the groups of news reporters who accomplished Watchdog and Infotainment media functions. Finally, the news reporters who accomplished the Watchdog media function were more influenced by their religious beliefs as compared to those who performed the infotainment function of media.

## Conclusion

The research concludes that religious beliefs are an important factor that influences news reporters in Pakistan who perform various media functions in their professional capacity. As the study findings revealed variance of this influence of religious beliefs for gender groups, revealing male news reporters being more influenced as compared to their female counterparts and old-age news reporters being more inclined towards religious beliefs while understating different media functions, the fact establishes an element of influence of religious beliefs on news reporters. The study also establishes that the influence of religious beliefs varies among news reporters when their professional roles change or differ from each other in terms of various media functions, i.e., as civic, service, loyal-facilitator, disseminator-interventionist, watchdog, and infotainment.

## Limitations and Recommendations

This research study had limitations in terms of study population and sample, demographic characteristics, geography, and variables as it was confined to measuring responses of the news reporters based in Islamabad and measuring the demographic characteristics of age and gender on the variable of Religious Beliefs and Practices through the application of “Belief into Action Scale.” The future research may explore more aspects like academic qualification, type of media served, and professional experience. The study population may be more inclusive, involving stakeholders in the news processes other than the news reporters. Geographically, the study may cover other cities and provinces of the country and may explore more aspects, like an inclination toward religious practices and its correlation to professional practices. Furthermore, qualitative studies like in-depth interviews, discussions, and case studies may also yield productive results.

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