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Peace Journalism as an Alternative to Conflict-Focused Media: Enhancing Diverse Voices and Providing Context for Conflict Understanding

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Abstract: This paper investigates peace journalism as an alternative to conflict-focused media, which can sometimes intensify tensions and contribute to societal polarization. Specifically, it explores two key practices within peace journalism: amplifying underrepresented voices and providing deeper contextual analysis in conflict-related reporting. Through examples such as media coverage of political unrest in various contexts and narratives surrounding emerging movements, the paper demonstrates how peace journalism promotes a more balanced representation of different perspectives, broadening public understanding of complex issues. By facilitating dialogue and addressing the underlying factors contributing to conflicts, peace journalism offers an approach that mitigates sensationalism and bias often present in conventional media. The findings suggest that peace journalism can contribute to social cohesion, encourage empathy, and enhance conflict-sensitive reporting, making it a valuable framework for contemporary media practices.

Keywords: peace journalism; conflict-focused media; voice to the voiceless; media context; conflict resolution

1. Introduction

Conflict-focused news is prevalent in war coverage, where media often portray a world marked by tensions, which contributes to widespread concern and uncertainty. Such reporting tends to highlight disruptive events and societal divisions, influencing public perception in a way that exacerbates fear and polarization. As awareness grows about the negative effects of this approach, there is an increasing interest in alternative methods that offer more balanced narratives. Among these alternatives, post-realist journalism, solutions journalism, and peace journalism have gained considerable attention.

Peace journalism, in particular, has garnered support for its potential to provide a more constructive and inclusive form of media reporting. Hanitzsch describes peace journalism as "a worthy concept intended to achieve highly desirable ends" [1]. Unlike traditional conflict-oriented journalism, peace journalism emphasizes the importance of presenting a wider range of perspectives and deeper context. By focusing on underlying issues such as social inequalities and historical factors, it seeks to foster dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation rather than simply escalating conflict.

This paper explores two key practices of peace journalism: "providing a voice to the voiceless" and "providing more depth and context to stories" [2]. The first practice challenges the tendency of mainstream media to prioritize dominant voices, ensuring that

marginalized or overlooked perspectives are included in public discourse. The second practice addresses the need for comprehensive context, which helps readers understand the broader socio-political factors behind conflicts.

Through case studies of recent media coverage—such as reporting on social tensions and emerging global actors—the paper demonstrates how peace journalism can offer a more balanced and empathetic approach to conflict. Ultimately, peace journalism has the potential to reduce societal divisions, promote empathy, and contribute to conflict resolution, making it a crucial tool for modern media practices.

2. A Voice to the Voiceless

Peace journalism provides a platform for underrepresented voices, helping to create a more balanced narrative in conflicting situations. Traditional media often reflect the perspectives of influential groups, which can lead to certain viewpoints dominating public discourse, regardless of whether they are based on facts or well-reasoned arguments. When media coverage is unbalanced, certain perspectives may receive less attention, making it harder for the public to recognize the full complexity of a situation. However, the lack of visibility does not mean these perspectives do not exist.

One important way to bridge differences between interest groups is through "communicative processes" [3]. Highlighting underrepresented voices can encourage dialogue between differing sides. When diverse perspectives are included in a balanced manner, journalism can serve as a tool to "mediate" [3]. Currently, many news reports focus on social tensions and political divisions, often intensifying disagreements. However, alternative perspectives do exist. Some reports, while covering polarized opinions, also include viewpoints from moderate voices who challenge extreme narratives. For example, some residents have expressed, "I just hope that people can sit down and talk without becoming radical." Such perspectives question excessive polarization and encourage more constructive discussions. This may encourage activists to engage in constructive dialogue and articulate their perspectives more clearly. By presenting viewpoints from different sides, media coverage can foster discussion, allowing concerns and doubts to be addressed in pursuit of more rational solutions.

Once underrepresented voices are incorporated into peace journalism, as Cottle states, conflicts can be better understood and negotiated [2]. For instance, by emphasizing that "many frustrated residents say it is time to set aside politics and focus on struggling communities" [3], media coverage can provide a more comprehensive perspective on social issues. Beyond political debates, concerns about livelihoods and community well-being also require attention. Addressing people's welfare is crucial for resolving political challenges and fostering social stability. Through such reporting, readers can recognize that public concerns extend beyond ideological divides and that not everyone aligns with extreme viewpoints.

Furthermore, highlighting underrepresented voices can be especially meaningful in divided societies, as common values may foster understanding [3]. When perspectives from similar social and cultural backgrounds find common ground, peace journalism becomes particularly effective in facilitating mutual recognition.

3. Context to Stories

Peace journalism provides abundant context and helps readers better understand conflicts. Media coverage is often influenced by societal and cultural contexts [4]. However, many conflicts involve people from different backgrounds, with distinct values and perspectives. This means that ideas accepted within one group may seem unfamiliar to another, and actions taken by one group may be misinterpreted by others. In such cases, when necessary context is lacking, readers may rely on their own cultural backgrounds, leading to a limited understanding of the conflict.

One way to address this issue is by providing substantial context. The concept of contextual objectivity suggests that media should take a closer look at localized content while maintaining impartiality [2]. Reporting that considers local sensibilities plays a crucial role in encouraging rational discourse and reducing misunderstandings by challenging preconceived notions [2].

In a BBC report, "Islamic State group: The full story" a survey on the engagement of young individuals in certain regions examines how factors such as unemployment, marginalization, and post-revolution disillusionment contribute to their involvement with certain organizations, rather than ideological motivations alone. This broader perspective helps readers understand the social realities faced by those involved in violent situations. It also challenges generalized assumptions about individuals from certain regions, emphasizing that their actions are often driven by common human needs. By incorporating these perspectives, global audiences gain a more nuanced understanding of the situation, reducing fear stemming from unclear motivations and limiting hostility fueled by simplified portrayals of violence.

On the other hand, news that lacks meaningful context can appear conflict-focused even when it claims to be objective. To attract attention, conventional journalism often prioritizes breaking news and highlights the most sensational aspects before providing deeper context. For example, certain groups often seek recognition for various incidents, and media reports may focus on these claims without delving into the broader socio-political conditions behind such actions. A more constructive approach would involve exploring the underlying causes and systemic factors contributing to these events.

The primary role of international reporting is to interpret—or "decode" [5]. While providing context does not justify conflicts, it clarifies underlying issues and highlights potential solutions. A common critique of international media is that they sometimes overlook deeper social and political contexts in conflict reporting [5]. It is overly simplistic to attribute all conflicts solely to acts of violence. What does the violence signify? What cultural, religious, and economic factors contribute to these issues? Addressing such questions enables more comprehensive journalism and helps audiences develop a well-rounded understanding.

Not only is current context necessary, but historical context also plays a key role in shaping public perceptions. Distortions and misrepresentations in reports often exacerbate tensions [5]. When historical context is provided, news articles are less likely to be misleading. For example, a BBC report explores regional tensions, linking them to historical events such as shifts in governance structures. By illustrating the complex relationships among various stakeholders, the report demonstrates that such conflicts did not emerge overnight and that violence, while immediate, is not necessarily the most effective path to resolution [6].

News breaks quickly, often with context added later. However, delays or the lack of essential background information can prevent readers from making well-informed assessments. Online reporting provides an opportunity for continuous updates, incorporating additional details and sources. BBC's online coverage exemplifies this approach by gradually expanding stories with new perspectives. For instance, it explores the experiences of women in various socio-political contexts and discusses the involvement of young individuals in conflict-related situations. Over time, these updates come together to form a more comprehensive narrative, helping readers grasp the interconnections between different events.

4. Conclusion

This paper has examined peace journalism as a viable alternative to the conflict-oriented media paradigm, which can sometimes exacerbate tensions and contribute to polarized public opinion. By focusing on two central practices—giving a voice to underrepre-

sented perspectives and providing deeper context to conflict-related stories—peace journalism offers a more balanced and solution-oriented approach to news reporting. Through case studies such as media coverage of political tensions and social conflicts, this paper has demonstrated how peace journalism can foster a more nuanced understanding of conflicts by amplifying diverse voices and enriching the audience's comprehension of the broader socio-political context.

The practice of giving a voice to underrepresented perspectives is instrumental in achieving a more equitable representation of the parties involved in a conflict. By ensuring that diverse perspectives are included in public discourse, peace journalism facilitates dialogue between opposing sides, creating opportunities for understanding and reconciliation. This approach addresses the media's tendency to prioritize the viewpoints of more dominant groups, ensuring that a broader range of voices is considered. Furthermore, this practice contributes to the broader goal of conflict resolution by promoting a more comprehensive and balanced narrative that encourages empathy and rational discourse.

In addition to amplifying diverse voices, peace journalism's emphasis on providing context to stories plays a crucial role in mitigating misinterpretation and fostering a deeper understanding of conflict. In a media landscape where stories are often framed through culturally specific lenses, providing adequate context helps bridge cultural divides and address preconceived notions. By offering both immediate and historical context, peace journalism enables audiences to appreciate the complexities underlying conflicts, moving beyond simplistic or sensationalist portrayals. This approach not only enhances the accuracy of media reporting but also cultivates more informed and empathetic readers who are less prone to cognitive biases in conflict-related news.

The findings of this study underscore the significance of peace journalism in contemporary media practices. As the media continues to shape public opinion and influence societal outcomes, integrating the principles of peace journalism presents an opportunity to foster a more balanced and dialogue-driven discourse. By prioritizing contextual understanding, empathy, and inclusive dialogue, peace journalism offers an alternative to the divisive and sensational tendencies found in some media coverage. In an increasingly interconnected world, where conflicts are often shaped by media narratives, peace journalism serves as a valuable tool for promoting global cooperation, reducing societal divisions, and supporting long-term conflict resolution. Thus, it is essential for media organizations and practitioners to embrace the principles of peace journalism as a foundational element of ethical and responsible reporting in the modern world.

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