

# Media Influence and Humanitarian Intervention During Crisis

Mallika Chugh

*Symbiosis International (Deemed University)*

*Gram: Lavale, Tal: Mulshi,*

*Dist: Pune, Maharashtra, India*

*Pin: 412115*

**Abstract-** Media plays a significant role during crises by disseminating timely information that leads to humanitarian intervention. It makes sure that the voices of those bearing the brunt of humanitarian crises are heard. It is a fact that the media is restricted to cover only a few select stories due to various constraints, however, the role played by them in creating public consciousness and sensitivity towards the crisis cannot be ruled out.

In this paper, a comparative analysis of the media reports concerning four important ongoing crises of the world, namely, the Syrian crisis, the Nigerian crisis, the Yemen crisis, and the Venezuela crisis has been carried out. Considering the effects of the media, I have made an attempt to understand and investigate the various reports relevant to the crisis that originated from two International English news organizations, the BBC and Al Jazeera. Analysis of reports indicates that they are educative and influential in molding public opinion. The collective response of International Organizations after the media reports has also been taken into cognizance. To judge the effective role of media in crises, the study applies discourse analysis as a means of qualitative analysis. It is found that news reports under the study give appropriate emphasis to humanitarian issues during crises. However, a different tone of reporting was noted between the two news organizations while covering news related to international interference during the crisis. This paper talks about these similarities and differences.

**Keywords –** Media, BBC, Aljazeera, Syrian Crisis, Nigerian Crisis, Yemen Crisis, Venezuela crisis

## I. Introduction

Media is a powerful tool in humanitarian intervention. The influence of media was questioned by Strobel (1997) and Gowing (1994), whereas a substantial impact of media during crisis was substantiated by Shaw (1999). Placing crisis and media alongside each other, it is evident that media consistently plays a vital role in the modern crisis through its coverage of international diplomacy, political relations and social outcomes in almost every aspect of the crisis. Media is one of the most effective avenues for initiating and stimulating a dialogue on the pressing issues and problems plaguing the people caught in conflict zones. The issues so highlighted through media reports implant the seed of consciousness in the public mind. In modern times, as a way to counter the threat of crisis, the media brings forth such issues to the center stage of public consciousness, creating a discourse to maneuver humanitarian intervention. Media informs and enlightens the public and by putting the spotlight on the grievances of victims of crisis it puts forth the problems for authorities to take cognizance.

Though every crisis is different from another, there exist many similarities in the pattern which require a quick response, fast decisions to settle the clash of fighting groups, choosing the best possible solution from limited choices available, the seriousness of the situation in the condition of the country is because of the previous actions taken. The Syrian crisis is an ongoing multifaceted conflict that is being fought between the Syrian president (supported by domestic and foreign allies such as Russia and Israel) and his opponents. The unrest that began in 2011, and was an outcome of a wider wave of Arab Spring protests, which escalated after the protesters that asked for the removal of Assad were violently crushed. Media has so far played a crucial role in bringing the horrors of the crisis before the people.

Media and its tools are highly effective ways to intervene in the cases of crisis, as was done during the Nigerian crisis that had started in 2009 after a militant group called Boko Haram started an armed rebellion against the elected government of Nigeria. The insurgency began in the backdrop of longstanding unsolved religious issues between Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities. The ultimate aim of the militants was to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria. The violence of militants was at its peak from 2010 to 2014, making it one of the bloodiest conflicts during

the period. Even though they were forced to retreat in 2015, the group started to raise its head again from 2018 onwards, after a long hiatus. The international media had successfully sought humanitarian intervention.

The Yemen crisis started with a fight between the Yemeni government headed by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi and the local Hauthi armed movement is supported by their allies from both sides. Both the factions claim to be the legal constituents of the official Yemeni government. According to the United Nations 2017 reports 13,045 civilians were reportedly killed after the coalition air campaigns, which began on 26 March 2015. The media has relentlessly continued to work in the affected areas to contribute towards bringing forth societal issues in front of the world.

The socioeconomic and political crisis of Venezuela began on 2 June 2010, while President Chavez was still in power. It is continuing to date under Nicolas Maduro's presidency. The crisis is due to hyperinflation, unending starvation, disease, and crime, resulting in alarmingly high emigration of its population. Extrajudicial killings by the Maduro government have become common and the United Nations (UN) has reported 5,287 killings in 2017 due to the actions of special forces and has added another 1,569 killings registered in the first half of 2019 alone. After the media reports exposed the gravity of the situation many international sanctions were imposed on the country. No less than 11 Latin American countries united to form a group to stand against the atrocities of the Maduro government. This forced Maduro to relax some of its oppressing policies bringing some relief to the people. Therefore, to ascertain the pivotal role of media during crisis, it is imperative to comprehend the real factors which cause crisis and the way media approaches these issues in its reports. It is essential to analyze and understand the extent of media influence in begetting humanitarian intervention during the crisis. Reports of ongoing crises by BBC and Al Jazeera have been chosen in particular to conduct content analysis.

## 2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The present study investigates the influence of the media during the Yemen crisis, the Nigerian crisis, the Venezuelan crisis, and the Syrian crisis resulting in humanitarian intervention for victims. Since a consequential analysis of the crisis needs to be worked out with a thorough emphasis on political leanings and economic dynamics, two international English language news sources were chosen. The BBC, for western perspective and Aljazeera for the gulf perspective. The news coverage by the two news organizations, for the entire duration since the onset of conflict has been selected, along with space or time allocated for it by the news organization. Various reports generated by the two sources covering similar issues were detected and then analyzed for their type, theme, and response by international Organizations. Discourse analysis has been used to study the role of media in a humanitarian intervention during crises.

### 2.1 Objectives

- To identify the role of the media during a crisis by analyzing the media contents of reports covering the Syrian crisis, Yemen Crisis, Nigerian Crisis, and the Venezuela Crisis.
- To analyze the content and context of news stories through discourse analysis.
- The extent of space and time allocation to crisis coverage.
- To compare the extent of media intervention during the humanitarian crisis to understand its constructive or destructive role.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Media plays a significant part in rebuilding public opinion and mobilizing national and worldwide strategies and policies, bringing help through relief operations in the area of crisis. Also, with the assistance of dependable, important, and focused data, individuals are better prepared to endure and survive a major humanitarian crisis; media is primarily considered as protector (Sahu and Ahmad, 2018). Literature related to media influence in a chronological manner reveals that initial research was aimed at studying the entwining effects that media, crisis, and policymaking garnered. It was Schorr (1991), who first examined the media's impact on U.S. policy and concluded that foreign the policy decisions are affected by 'breaking news'. To study the impact of media on different operations, Freedman (2000), Livingston (2000), Hammond, and Herman (2000) investigated the impact of media during NATO's intervention in Kosovo and concluded that the impact was large. Freedman (2000, p.339) acknowledged that television had a threefold affect. The governments are compelled to intervene through the visuals of crisis in the first impact. The governments are allowed to pull out of humanitarian interventions by the pictures of grief and loss, in the second impact. The third impact was the "bullying" effect encouraging NATO and America to bomb key targets at Kosovo while preventing them from targeting normal civilians. Thussu (2000) had concluded in a study that exhaustive media coverage of crisis by global television news organizations, mobilized NATO

bombings on Yugoslavia as a humanitarian intervention. Feist (2001, p. 713) conducted a study on the same topic and he concluded that the policymakers of US submitted to intervene due to “compelling images of the humanitarian crisis. Miller (2002) investigated the media impact on both the British and American governments' policies. Those facts derived upon were enough to establish the power that the Media executed during policymaking in favor of the humanitarian crisis. Robinson (2000a, 2002, 25-35) also emphasized in his study that media plays an important part in policy making. Some of the studies brought out the reverse phenomenon.

Sahu and Rao (2013), in their study concerning coverage of Telangana issue during undivided Andhra Pradesh, in two major National dailies of India, revealed the business centric approach adopted by the newspapers. They revealed that the newspapers failed to bring out the truth. The reports were devoid of the required emphasis on the crisis with adequate background about the issue. Perhaps the Telangana issue was not on their agenda.

Ali Nasiri (2015), in a study, stated that although every crisis is different from one another, there exist many similarities and a pattern that requires an early response and quick decisions to choose the best possible solution from the limited number of choices available to pre plan the management of disasters and crisis

Fateme Ghassabi (2015), in the study of the crisis of Azerbaijan earthquake conducted a survey of university students of Allameh Tabatabai University in Tehran. The results of her studies showed that media played an important and positive role in getting humanitarian help for the people in need. Mass communication plays a major role during catastrophes and emergencies.

Keerthana Thankachan (2018) writes about another media effects paradigm while analyzing the role of media and its influence during conflicts as an agent of information. The study carried a comparative analysis of media coverage by two leading newspapers with different perspectives. The results revealed that the most of the stories contributed towards aggravating the conflict further. A disturbing trend of modern news media that contributed towards increasing the vehemence of the conflict was observed.

Kiplimo and Nabushawo, C. (2015, p 77) in their study concluded that objectivity in journalism continues to remain important. The aspect is more visible in promotion of peace, where it is expected that media exudes high level of integrity, freedom of expression and professional ethics. Considering the noteworthy difference in news values of peace and tensions, it is expected that media abides by ethical deliberations that are considered essential in its response peacemaking initiative.

Therefore, the available literature points towards the idea that media plays a crucial role in remodeling public perception and mobilizing national and international policies, resulting in relief operations in times of crisis. However, at the same time factual and correct reporting with no vested interests is also important. The argument about the relation between media and its intervention continues without analyzing the collective response generated by combined efforts of various organizations, such as the media, U.N., government, political scenario, and the mindset of readers in putting humanitarian issues as an agenda. Available literature has not zeroed in on certain issues on media influence and its intervention during the Crisis from a broad perspective due to less research. The present study would attempt to address them. Nevertheless; it is still pertinent to examine the various issues and techniques that were used in previous studies on media influence and humanitarian intervention.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

Discourse analysis as a model for qualitative analysis has been adopted to accomplish the study. Discourse analysis is one of the five ways distinguished by Wertz, et al, (2011) of doing qualitative research. Media reports related to the Yemen crisis, the Syrian refugee crisis, the Venezuela crisis, and the Nigerian Boko Haram crisis were studied. The major two international news organizations of the world, BBC, and Al Jazeera were selected by focusing on the contexts at which the stories are reported.

The reports collected for a period starting from the year 2009 till date (the period of crisis) includes news stories, articles, editorials, opinions and comments. The collected reports were segregated manually, clustered into the categories and then a discourse analysis was conducted, to understand the role of media in building public opinion and setting an agenda which affects international policies during crises resulting in humanitarian intervention. The collected material was categorized into Perceptions of Western Culture, Quantum of Suffering, and Special Stories: Call for Humanitarian Intervention.

## 5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The projection of religious and political conflicts as humanitarian crisis news stories is one of the prime characteristics detected in reporting the conflicts by both BBC News and Al Jazeera. Both organizations command wide coverage globally. Moreover, both news organizations have explored the causes and motives of various factions in detail, dwelling deep into various contributing factors from multiple angles scientifically supporting their reports with factual data and proofs. The role of both the news organizations in the crisis has displayed their painstaking efforts right from the stage of collection of precise information to its timely communication to save humanity. From the crisis of Syria to Yemen to Nigeria to Venezuela, the humanitarian needs are incessant, in the protracted conflicts of the modern world. With the crisis becoming more complex and chronic with each passing day, media coverage is one strong driver for getting humanitarian intervention by building a political pressure for the international organizations to take cognizance of those in need. The key outcome of analysis is given out in the succeeding paragraphs.

### 5.1 Perceptions of Western Culture

Pre-existing animosities entwined with political goals are the most prominent cause for conflicts, causing a humanitarian crisis, with multiple occurrences of stories related to religious and political opinions in the articles and interviews that appeared on both BBC and Al Jazeera. Interviews and stories of prominent personalities have been used by both the agencies to substantiate their claims. For instance, a news report of Al Jazeera, dated 22 Dec 2016, quoted a statement by political scientist, Prouse de Montclo who said, "Their (militants) target group was initially security forces and 'bad' Muslims who followed the western way of life. It was not the Christians. But in 2010, Christian minorities were targeted with planned attacks". Similarly, BBC in a report dated 23 October 2017, quoted Naomi Adamo, a survivor of Boko Haram kidnapping. She said, "Then they (militants) came to us and said, 'Those who are Muslim, let them be on one side and those who are Christian let them be on one side', they were angry at Christians for following Western ways". Both news organizations highlight negative perceptions of Western culture.

### 5.2 *Quantum of Suffering*

The rise of the crisis resulting from political disputes was visible as an outcome of conflict wherein the scope of reconciliation through media intervention has been extended by both organizations, though more efforts were stemmed in on behalf of Al Jazeera. In the case of Al Jazeera, the reports pragmatically presented the root cause of the problem, and subtly suggested more than one solution to neutralize it through dialogue between local leaders. BBC reports highlighted the need for an overall effort for peace and reconciliations through external interventions from the western world and international organizations, strategically supporting its demand with accurate facts and figures. The evidence in this regard can be discerned by a report of Al Jazeera dated 25 March 2018, regarding the Yemen crisis wherein the United Nations has been quoted to present an estimate regarding refugees. It was stated that over 3 million refugees had fled the country, while 28,000 were estimated to have sought asylum from neighboring countries. Similarly, BBC, in its report dated 28 March 2017, referred to the UN data to quote that, "Yemen is at present going through one of the worst humanitarian crisis in world". Emphasizing on the high rate of casualties, losses both economic and of human life. The report carried a statement from The executive director of World Food Program has warned that the time is very less to stop famine and the organization is left with few months of food for the country. The report focused on the quantum of devastation and highlighted the work being done by the international organizations.

Thus, while such reports of BBC strategically concentrated more on the loss due to crisis and focused on beckoning humanitarian intervention, Al Jazeera went ahead with predictive yet in-depth and soulful coverage of the grim realities of crisis while seeking global attention. Therefore, portraying the quantum of devastation formed a leading strategy by both the news propagators. It became the primary factor for garnering international attention.

Innovative approaches by the media allowing readers to interpret the situation through tales of misery and crisis expanded antipathy amongst the people all over the world, even though they do not share any direct involvement. The statements of various leaders substantiated the need for humanitarian interventions. The reports gleaned from ground zero backed with a well-researched data are perceived to be dependable analytically. Such reports impact the hearts and mind of the people, building public opinion required for humanitarian intervention.

### 5.3 *Special Stories*

Throughout the crisis, both BBC and Aljazeera allotted prime space to special stories and interviews that conveyed subtle indications that the story in question demanded special attention from the world. The reports of both BBC and

Aljazeera resulted in charged responses globally due to their conversational undertones resulting in immediate humanitarian intervention. Addressing the differences in coverage of both the news organizations, the importance of political relations and international support were given more importance in BBC whereas Al Jazeera reports stressed that the superpowers were fighting their wars and exploiting the crisis for their benefit. They emphasized diplomatic solutions through dialogue.

#### *5.4 Call for Humanitarian Intervention*

The greed of some powerful countries has allowed the crisis to get bloodier by every passing day, since the crisis benefits these countries either strategically or economically. The facts have been brought out in the reports by Al Jazeera, for example in a report on Venezuela, dated 22 Jan 2019, it was disclosed that most prominent five US refineries had either completely stopped or reduced the purchase of crude oil from Venezuela. Moreover, international sanctions have affected many industries such as oil and gold. This has resulted in weakening the economy of the country. On the other hand, the BBC has either completely ignored the subject or has very lightly touched upon the subject in its reports.

The slight damage has been controlled because the BBC has much wider circulation globally than Al Jazeera. Therefore, even if it reports some very minute details about a crisis, it induces a reaction from the global population creating the hypodermic needle effect that promulgates a media control over their audiences resulting in an immediate effect for humanitarian intervention. The effort of Al Jazeera as a promoter of humanitarian intervention, despite rejecting the intervention of greedy superpowers, was visibly evident during crisis reporting as it emphasized more upon diplomatic solutions through dialogue.

The result of reports covering the crises clearly showed that both BBC and Al Jazeera slightly differed while framing the collective response of international organizations as per their ideological slant. Given this backdrop, both the news organizations dedicated prime space and time to the coverage of the crisis. It was found that the media has visibly had an important role in maneuvering mass opinion and increasing vehemence of international organizations, which has resulted in much required humanitarian intervention in all the four crises under study.

The international media has ardently strived hard to disseminate the correct information, boldly facing the challenge to address the outcome of years of aggression and animosities of conflicts. Though at times media did stagger from its path by displaying a varied tone of reporting, downplaying, or highlighting certain issues, however, they have not budged away from the truth. The media has tried to present the facts threadbare and has thus exposed the greed of some of the elitist superpowers of the world.

## IV.CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study demonstrate the key role played by the media during the crisis by covering various types of stories bearing different themes and issues in an apt and timely manner. The accomplished international media has presented the accurate facts and figures in a very clinical way, relegating the unnecessary political clamor behind the emotional and economic aspects of the stories. The relentless efforts have managed to put the Syrian crisis, the Yemen crisis, the Nigerian crisis, and the Venezuelan crisis in the center stage of the world creating enough momentum to accelerate the international organizations into action.

It has been conclusively discerned that media intervention can support the peace and reconciliation during crisis. The news reports of international media organizations have reflected their efforts to pragmatically bring out the quantum of devastation, within the vast backdrop of religious, political, or socio-economic conflicts. Media has also mediated by either offering a diplomatic solution or by bringing in humanitarian intervention from international organizations. The role of international organizations, as identified through the reports, was also found to be adequate. These international organizations like the UN and WHO to name a few have provided the required assistance to the victims of the crisis in form of either aid or assistance. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that the media has a significant part in rebuilding public opinion and mobilizing national and worldwide strategies and policies, bringing help through relief operations in the area of crisis.

## REFERENCES

- Feist, S. (2001). Facing down the global village: The media impact. In R. Kugler & E. Frost (Eds.), *The global century* (pp. 709-725). Washington, DC: National Defense University Press.
- Freedman, L. (2000). Victims and victors: Reflections on the Kosovo war. *Review of International Studies*, 26, 335-358.
- Hammond, P., & Herman, E. (Eds.) (2000). *Degraded capability: The media and the Kosovo crisis*. London: Pluto Press.
- Kiplimoand K G, Nabushawo J (2015). The critical role of mass media in resolving conflict. *International Journal of Advancements in Research & Technology*, Volume 4, Issue - 68 ISSN 2278-7763.
- Livingston, S. (2000). *Media coverage of the war: An empirical assessment*. A. Schnabel (Eds. New York: United Nations University Press.
- Magder, Ted (2003) —Watching What We Say: Global Communication in a Time of Fear! in DayaKishanThussu & Des Freedman (eds.) *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7*. London: Sage Publications.
- Miller, D. (2002, March). Measuring media pressure on security policy decision-making in liberal states: The positioning hypothesis. Paper presented at the annual convention of the International Studies Association, New Orleans.
- Nasiri A, Aryankhesal A, Khankeh H (2015) Leadership in limbo: Characteristics of successful incident commanders in health sector of a disaster-prone country, *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*.
- Nye, J. S. (2011). *The future of power: It's changing nature and use in the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.
- Puddephatt, Andrew. (2006). *Voices of War Conflicts and the Role of Media*. Published by international media support.
- Robinson, P. (2000a). The policy-media interaction model: Measuring media power during humanitarian crisis. *Journal of Peace Research*, 37, 613-633.
- Robinson, P. (2000b). World politics and media power: Problems of research design. *Media, Culture and Society*, 22, 227-232.
- Robinson, P. (2001). Operation restores hope and the illusion of a news media driven intervention. *Political Studies*, 49, 941-956.
- Sahu G, Ahmad A (2018). News Media Coverage on Human Rights Issues: Comparative Analysis of the Times of India and the Hindu, *Journal of Knowledge & Communication Management*, vol: 8 (2) pp: 149-165.
- Sahu GK, Rao A, (2013). Agenda Setting Role of the Press on Telangana Issue: Content Analysis of two English Dailies. *International Journal of Communication Development*, Vol. 3, No. 1.
- Schorr, D. (1991). Ten days that shook the White House. *Columbia Journalism Review*, pp. 21- 23.
- Seib, P. (2002). *The global journalist: News and conscience in a world of conflict*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Thankachan K (2018). Media during the Time of Conflicts: A Comparative Analysis of The Hindu and Dawn with Reference to the After-math of 'Uri Attack' ; Paper presented at Inspiria Excellence Series Multidisciplinary Conference on Future Paradigms in Industry, Inspiria Knowledge Campus, Siliguri (ICFPI-2018).
- The Fateme G, (2015). Role of media in crisis management: A case study of Azerbaijan earthquake. *International Journal of Health System and Disaster Management* | Vol. 3 | Issue 2 |
- Thussu, D. (2000). Legitimizing "humanitarian intervention" CNN, NATO and the Kosovo crisis. *European Journal of Communication*, 15, 345-361.
- Virgil Hawkins (2001). *The Price of inaction: The Media and Humanitarian Intervention*; *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*.