

BBCWS, Connectivity and the Pakistani Diaspora

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Abstract³

BBC Urdu Service has long played a crucial role in connecting listeners in Pakistan to producers and consumers in the wider Urdu speaking diaspora. However, shifts in global politics, especially the so called 'Global war on Terror' on one hand, and professional and technological developments in the field of mass communication in Pakistan on the other, have affected the role as well as the perceived credibility of the BBC Urdu Service among Pakistanis at home and in the diaspora. This paper is based on empirical research in Pakistan and among the Pakistani diaspora in Germany. It investigates how the Urdu services are used on an everyday basis and at times of crisis by Pakistanis at home and abroad. It situates the use of the BBC Urdu services in the wider context of news media consumption of our sample group. Through the use of group discussion, in-depth interview techniques and archival data from BBC we offer a unique analytical perspective on the changing role of the BBCWS (BBC Urdu) as an international and diasporic broadcaster and as an agent of public diplomacy.

Introduction

Human history reveals that man has kept on migrating from one place to another since quite long. Such movements are either caused by the prevailing adverse social, political, economic, religious, ethnic, and environmental conditions, and/ or others like trade, culture, imperial rule (Tsagarousianou, 2004), or some attractions of the host society(ies) that the emigrants perceive essential for themselves. This is a continuous process and even today one can observe the influx of immigrants from different parts of the world into countries that offer better opportunities to them. Nevertheless, these emigrants even after settling in and getting citizenship of the host country tend to exhibit greater psychological proximity with their respective people and land. They identify themselves and like to keep themselves connected with their culture (Song, 2005, Moon, 2003), and usually think about homeland (Tsagarousianou, 2004). They therefore, exhibit strong mental associations with the land and society back at home. These emigrants or diasporas no doubt like their predecessors have shifted their geographic locations and do live far away from their land of origin but unlike the displaced populations of the earlier times, are closely connected to the peoples and countries of their origin as technological developments, especially those related to communication, have ceased time and vanished distances in the present age, and now they live in a global village (McLuhan, 1987).

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There are various kinds of diasporas and on the bases of the reasons of diasporisation, they can be grouped into different types for example, victim, labour, trade, imperial and cultural diasporas (Cohen, 1997). However, Pakistani diasporas in Germany can generally be categorised into trade and labour diasporas. These groups are not exclusive as they are sharing the reasons of diasporisation. The researchers therefore, studied the labour and trade Pakistani diasporas here in Leipzig, Germany. Pakistani emigrants living in Leipzig are dealing in garments, and running their own restaurants, while the Pakistani labour class here usually work with Pakistanis, and Indians as labourers. The researchers also interviewed a group of Pakistani students who are doing their higher education in the University of Leipzig. These diasporas have proximity to use modern communication technology to connect with their homeland.

By dint of technology-based communication (mass communication, and technology assisted interpersonal communication) the contemporary diasporas are closely connected to the countries of their origin and vice versa. "Diasporas, as transnational communities, have always depended on mediation and networking for sustaining relations and communication (Silverstone, 2005: 45)". In the contemporary age various types of media such as newspapers, radio, satellite television, and the fast-growing web sites serve the needs of various diasporas. Today we see that mass media organisations of different countries, particularly the electronic news media organisations broadcast in languages other than their own countries to achieve varied policy objectives like BBC.

The BBC through its World Service in 33 different languages* caters of the media-related needs of speakers of these languages who are either at home or living abroad as diasporas. The BBC began its Urdu transmissions in May,1940 under Hindustani Service. However, BBC Urdu got its current name in 1966. Besides a large number of consumers across the globe, almost 13 million people in Pakistan are using BBC Urdu radio and online contents. BBC radio broadcasts three news bulletins i.e. Jahan Numa, Sairbeen, and Shabnama. These bulletins are also available on the [bbc.com](http://bbc.com/urdu), the Urdu website of BBC. In the recent past BBC has also collaborated with an FM radio channel, Mast FM 103 for rebroadcasting news bulletin in Pakistan. Electronic media, radio and television, were kept for almost 50 years under direct state control, and even today Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television are state-run organisations. In such a situation BBC Urdu was the source of a greater number of media consumers for satiating their thirst for news and views on important national and international affairs.

In Pakistan the airwaves have recently been de-regularised. The first private radio station, FM100, started its transmissions from March 23, 1995*. The private radios were allowed initially to broadcast music and entertainment programmes*. However, with the passage of time they have also started broadcasting news. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) vigilantly monitoring such news broadcasts and whenever it finds news contents which it considers are not suiting the government (may be suitable for the public in general or a product of sound professional efforts), it take action against the radio station. Likewise PEMRA raided Mast FM 103 in Karachi and closed its transmissions for violating broadcasting laws, after it refused to stop relaying BBC Urdu service news bulletins. The radio was accused of portraying Pakistan Army negatively in its relief operations in the

* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/languages/>

* <http://www.fm100pakistan.com/history.asp>

* <http://www.southtravels.com/asia/pakistan/media.html>

October, 2005 earthquake hit areas of the country*. Though in Pakistan the first private television station, Shalimar Television Network was established in 1993* but the people could watch free and objective news, and bold and pluralistic talk shows here only after 2000 when Indus Vision, ARY, Geo TV, Aaj TV, and some other private television channels began their transmissions. Besides these policy changes and technological developments, the so-called war on terror being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan has posed some serious threats to the perceived credibility, popularity, and the ultimate use of the BBC Urdu Service among the Pakistanis at home and abroad. Nevertheless, imposition of ban on private electronic news media in Pakistan after November 3, 2007 has once again pushed the masses into the era when the national radio (PBC) and television (PTV) were totally controlled by the state, and they were relying, to a greater extent, on international broadcasters such as BBC, VOA, and CNN for fair and objective news and information.

According to BBC founder Sir John Reith, one of the main objectives of the BBC was to connect the British diasporas with home and vice versa. However, the present study is concerned with BBC Urdu, one of the languages of BBC World Service. BBC Urdu is a multi-media broadcast service consisting of radio and its website "bbcurdu.com". To our knowledge no study has so far been conducted to explore that (1) whether and to what extent Pakistani diasporas, especially that living in Germany use BBC Urdu Service for their connectivity with their land, culture and people, (2) how do they perceive BBC Urdu Service in, especially when the UK along with USA and others is combating the war-on-terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, crisis situation for instance earthquake and the recent political developments in Pakistan, like imposition of the state-of-emergency, suspension of the constitution and promulgation of Provisional Constitution Order (PCO), and ban on private television channels? The present study is therefore, planned to explore the role of BBC Urdu Service (World Service) in the changing circumstances in connectivity of the Pakistani diaspora (in Germany) with their home country and culture, and also to investigate the perceptions of consumers of BBC Urdu Service in Pakistan about its role in the changing situations within and outside the country in informing and educating them as compared to other alternative news mass media. The present study is therefore, planned to explore the role of BBC Urdu Service (World Service) in the changing circumstances in connectivity of the Pakistani diaspora (in Germany) with their home country and culture, and also to investigate the perceptions of consumers of BBC Urdu Service in Pakistan about its role in the changing situations within and outside the country in informing and educating them as compared to other alternative news mass media.

Theoretical Background

In line with uses and gratifications, and expectancy-value theories, which consider that media consumers are active, media-use behaviour is rational and related to the nature of needs (instrumental or habitual), and view that media consumers have expectations from media for fulfilment of their media-related needs, while those needs are related to social positions and psychological dispositions of the users (Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1974; Rosengren, 1974), the researchers assume that social positions and psychological dispositions of Pakistani diasporas in Germany, and that of others at home will influence their expectations from BBC Urdu service, and hence will influence their use of BBC Urdu service and/ or other alternative news mass media for fulfilment of their respective media-related needs. The researchers view that besides consumer side factors; there are also certain media side factors (McQuail, 2005) that influence media consumption of the users. The researchers assumed that a large number of mass media are available to the Pakistani diaspora in Germany however; to get themselves connected to their land and culture they select only those ones which are more compatible to

* <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/11/20/wpak20.xml&sShe>

* <http://tariq.com.pk/tcn/introduction.html>

their psychological structures, sociological positions, and serve their media-related needs. Similarly, they viewed that people in Pakistan will tend to use those sources of information that they perceive as objective, impartial, easily understandable, quick, and detailed.

Research Method

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers conducted group discussions (FGDs) with Pakistani emigrants living in Leipzig, Germany and users of BBC Urdu Service both in urban and rural areas in Pakistan. Focus group discussions “is a research strategy for understanding audience/ consumer attitudes and behaviours....focus group responses are more complete (Wimmer & Dominick, 1995: 148-9). Nevertheless, the researchers also used BBC archival data as secondary data sources like Annual Correspondence (AC) and Annual Correspondence Report (ACR) for the study.

The researchers conducted three group interviews in Leipzig, and one group each in Mardan, Vehari and Lahore. Each group was composed of six persons. The groups were formed on the bases of respondents' occupation, income, education, access to BBC, and gender. One group of the Pakistani diasporas was represented by traders, the second one by labourers and the third one was composed of Pakistani students studying here in the University of Leipzig. All the respondents were male. The mean education level of the traders and labourers was intermediate, while that of the students was masters. The mean age of the traders was 42, while that of the labourers and students was 31, and 25 respectively. The Pakistani and German groups (German-based Pakistanis) were slightly different from one another; respondents of the Pakistani groups were selected from urban and rural areas i.e., Mardan, Vehari (rural areas) and Lahore (urban area) whereas, participants of the FGDs in Germany were all from the city of Leipzig (urban area). The groups were selected through purposive sampling technique. All of them were light or frequent users of the BBC Urdu Service. Majority of respondents in Leipzig were using BBC Urdu service website, while in Pakistan, BBC Urdu radio was the main source. However, respondents in Lahore, Mardan and Vehari were mixed like labourers/ workers, businessman, teachers, Govt employees and students. The FGDs in Mardan and Vehari were conducted with listeners of BBC Radio, while that of Lahore was undertaken with users of bbcUrdu.com. Participants of these groups were also consuming other mass media. Respondents from Mardan and Vehari have had television sets in their homes but they had no access to transmission of Pakistani private television channels due to lack of facilities of cable and dish antenna. They were also lacking internet facility. On the other hand, the group interviewees from Lahore have had access to private television networks, internet, and also print media. Similarly, all the three groups of Pakistani diaspora had the facility of internet. However, the students and labourers had no terrestrial or non-terrestrial television, whereas the traders had mostly non-terrestrial television connections.

The data were gathered in two different time periods from the Pakistani groups: first in July, 2007 and then in November, 2007 when the government banned the telecast of private television channels, promulgated Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) and imposed the state of emergency in the country. The group interviews with Pakistani diasporas were conducted in August, 2007. The group discussions were recorded, and after completion of the data collection process the recorded tapes were transcribed and the data were analysed and interpreted using the annotating the script method.

Though BBC Urdu Service covers almost every walk of life in its news, analyses and columns, and one can make broader categories of programmes of the BBC Urdu such as politics, art and culture, sports, science and technology, commerce and trade, human interest, religion, history, environment, courts and crimes, and natural/ man-made disasters. However, our

collected data on consumption of BBC Urdu both from groups of Pakistani diaspora in Germany, and Pakistan show the following patterns:

Groups' perceptions of political coverage of BBC Urdu Service

Group discussions with the Pakistani diaspora in Leipzig and users of BBC Urdu Service in Pakistan revealed that besides other important contents they expose themselves to BBC Urdu Service and other sources of information to keep themselves abreast of political developments back in the country (Pakistan) and in the region. The respondents had varied attitude towards BBC. The nature and extent of BBC Urdu Service was also found differently in groups. There were two views among the respondents. The respondents (mainly in Vehari and Mardan) believed that BBC Urdu service is considered as agent of protection and promotion of human rights, freedom and civil liberties. They were found very pleased with the news and analyses of BBC Radio. They viewed that BBC Radio was the best source for their information and education on national as well as international political affairs. The groups' members perceived BBC Urdu service as impartial, objective and balanced. They opined that BBC radio is playing a positive role in expanding their political insight. Some were claiming that BBC Radio is inculcating democratic values, promotes civic values in Pakistan and keeps inform about the latest human rights condition in Pakistan. The diasporas in Leipzig however, were critical of *bbcurdu.com*. They alleged that BBC Urdu is not fair and impartial in its coverage of Pakistani politics. They claimed that BBC Urdu Service is biased in its coverage. They believed that BBC Urdu Service is projecting western agenda.

The collected data regarding BBC Urdu's political coverage are further divided into the following sub-categories:

(i) BBC Urdu and Pakistani politics

Our data reveal that respondents had mixed views regarding coverage of prevailing Pakistani politics. Participants of FGDs mainly in Mardan and Vehari, the radio listeners groups, appreciated the role of BBC as far their own political knowledge and education was concerned. For example the respondents expressed themselves as follow:

Muhammad⁴: BBC provides fair and unbiased news. It gives views point of all concerned parties....Radio Pakistan does not give us correct picture of important political issues...I listen BBC for long but in the present situation it has become more important for me...

Jamal: BBC Urdu service enabled me to know what is going on between Musharraf and Benazir... what political role the MMA has played so far...why Nawaz Sharif was deported and then allowed to come to Pakistan...

Salman: Normally we cast our vote in favour of the candidate who has support of our "*Biradaray*" but BBC has realised me that vote is much worthy than such affiliation...it is a source of change in the system...

Gulzar: Earlier I had a very negative attitude towards nationalist political parties, but after listening to their point of view through BBC now I have changed my opinion...

However, there were others who criticised political coverage of BBC Urdu service. Such criticism was mainly witnessed in the traders and students groups in Leipzig, and the FGD in Lahore. Some of the respondents had the following evaluation of political coverage of Pakistani politics:

⁴ Names are change to protect the identity of the respondents.

Waheed: Why do the BBC and other Western media give so much coverage to Benazir? This is not journalism rather it is interference.....

Ijaz: Why does the BBC portrays Nawaz as fundamentalist....

Khalid: The Western media including BBC depicts Benazir as prime minister...

Riaz: I think it is futile to expect fair and impartial reporting from BBC Urdu till their forces are engaged in Afghanistan, and they need Pakistan support in the “war on terror”...

Saleem: The West and Western media will support those who they consider are loyal to them and can serve their interest in the region...

Zaheer: Normally BBC is objective but it does not compromise its national interest...as far as coverage of Pakistani politics is concerned BBC is found inclined more towards the so-called secular forces there.....

Archival data support this claim. For example, one person wrote to BBC:

An audience raised this concern in BBC Audience correspondence: “I feel the BBC programmes now reflect the policy of the UK government. Objective reporting is no more there. This sort of tilt does not befit with the standard of the BBC”. Gul Zeb Bahawalpur, Punjab (ACR October 2006). Similarly, on the 6th August a person wrote: “we heard a long awaited programme “Pakistani women in Politics”. It was very well presented. We are grateful to the BBC and its producers. But at the same time it gives us the impression that this programme was aimed at promoting Benazir Bhutto’ s election campaign... This biased act does not suite the corporation like the BBC. I would request you to keep politics away from your programme till elections in Pakistan are over. Please discuss some other issues instead, K.S. Arabia (ACR July- August 1993).

Besides this, the group viewed live talk shows of Geo television and newspaper columns of the online editions of Pakistani newspapers as the sources of their political knowledge and education for them. They considered BBC Urdu as a source after Pakistani private channels and online newspapers of their connectivity with Pakistan. These sources, especially the live talk shows of the television channels were considered more objective, and more educative than the BBC Urdu service.

(ii) BBC coverage of Independence day

BBC coverage on the eve of Independence Day 2007 was criticized. People criticised BBC Urdu analyses especially the articles placed on [bbc.com](http://bbc.com/urdu) relating to creation of Pakistan in August 2007 on the eve of Independence Day coverage.

Ahtisham: See BBC Urdu coverage of August, it is a deliberate attempt to sway the young generation that the creation of Pakistan was unjustified...

Waheed: It is so framed to show that the Muslims leaders were responsible for the miseries of both the Muslims and Hindus...

Khalid: such reporting lacks its historical context....

Ijaz: it might have negative impact on the youth. It is simply interference...

BBC Urdu service independence coverage in August has raised the questions of the establishment and existence of the country (in people’s views). People have recognised the problems and different junctures, path, troubles of the independence. Respondents pointed out the articles, analysis on the BBC Urdu website⁵ and raised the question on the credibility about these analyses.

⁵ See for instance: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/partition60/index.shtml>

(iii) BBC coverage of Taliban and Madrassas

The respondents especially the diasporac groups and the FGD in Lahore were critical of BBC coverage Taliban, and Madrassas (Islamic seminaries). However, when the researcher asked that that was it not a fact that most of the extremists were Muslims or belonged to Muslim countries? The respondents argued as follow:

Nabil: “these extremists are also in other societies for example Nazi, Nationalist, Hindu, Christian, and Jews extremists groups but their activities have never been related to their belief system and/ or countries...

Zakir: The coverage of Taliban and Madrassas in international media including BBC gives an impression that Islamic schools are spreading hatred and Islamic fascism, and the students of these schools are lacking socialisation...

Butt: We are against terrorism whosoever may do it. They have no religion. Hence, to blame a particular religion for activities of a few wicked men is not fair...

Waheed: BBC is also playing a part in the war against terror. Whenever the government of Pakistan is going to struck a deal with Pakistani Taliban in tribal areas for peace and normalcy in the area, BBC makes great hue and cry...

Rahim: There are crimes in London, but why always negative news focuses on Pakistan? There is extremism among Muslims no doubt, but why do not they report Western crimes and spread hatred against Muslims only ... They show like all extremism relates only to Muslims; I don't think that's true ...

Archival data support this argument raised by the respondents and said that one race and religion is overly and negatively projected.

Faiyaz Ansari, Azmat Garh, UP, wrote to BBC Urdu service: “The West is trying unsuccessfully to malign the Muslims all over the world by coining a term ‘Islamic terrorism’. The reason behind it is not what they describe but it is the outcome of the cold war. The Muslims who are responsible for suicide attacks and explosions have been prepared and trained in the West” (ACR Annual 2006).

When the respondents were asked that when they were so critical of BBC Urdu service they why did they use it? They argued that firstly, it did not mean that they were seeing each content of BBC negatively. Secondly, it gives them the opportunity to see how the international media portray their land and society.

BBC Urdu service and cultural reporting

Respondents' views on BBC coverage of Pakistani art, culture, and sports have been classified as follow:

(i) BBC and Urdu language

Our collected data, especially from the FGDs conducted with BBC radio listeners reveal that respondents were appreciating the use of language in the BBC Urdu service, and at the same time they expressed resentment for use of words from other languages, especially English in the news bulletins, which according to them, were making problems of comprehending the message. The respondents expressed themselves as:

Azhar: I listen to BBC for almost ten years. Though I am not highly educated, but I understand BBC news and analyses very well. Its language is easy and easily understandable...

Javed: To me BBC uses the easiest language...instead of using English words; it always uses proper Urdu words. I am living in a village and have never travelled to Punjab or Karachi but I can speak good Urdu. BBC is my teacher....

However, the archival data show that some respondents have reservations about the use of English words. For example, one letter came to BBC Urdu service with the claim: *We have observed during last few months that the BBC Urdu Service has increased the use of English words in its transmissions. Whereas more appropriate Urdu words are available.* Muhammad Amjad Muzaffargarh, Punjab (ACR November 2006). Likewise, concerns were raised by another person who argued that sometimes BBC uses inappropriate words that do not situations properly. For example, one listener of BBC radio wrote:

I have been listening to your radio broadcasts for past 30 years. I am a teacher in a Primary School. On January 8, you reported that Israeli Prime Minister had a heart attack and then you corrected it immediately saying that it was due to the bursting of a vein. You used 'shiryan' and 'rag' at the same time while they are the same. You should have used either of the two and not both of them. Second lapse was noticed in your night transmission when you said that hajjis (pilgrims) marched from Arafat to Muzdalfa where they will perform the sacrifice. You must know that the sacrifice is performed at Mina and not at Muzdalfa. R. Ibrahim Parkar, Ratnagiri, MS (ACR Annual 2006).

One respondent complained that the media are interested to change their social, political, religious and language identity. Once the BBC was considered as the institute of Urdu but now it has been bent upon demolishing its identity. Listeners of BBC Urdu service expressed his views as follow:

The Use of English words is increasing in the BBC Urdu Service with the passage of time. A few years ago BBC Urdu Service was known as an institution of Urdu language. Niaz Khan Sahiwal, Punjab (ACR January 2007)⁶.

(ii) BBC and Pakistani social values

People mentioned Pakistani television channels as sources of their connectivity to Pakistani culture; particularly the changing trends there in fashion and festivals. People's were critic on the imposition western norms. The students' group mentioned the case of a British born Pakistani (Mirza Tahir Hussain⁷) who was awarded death sentence for killing a taxi driver in Pakistan. They group members viewed that the BBC gave undue importance to this case. They termed such acts as intentional efforts on the part of BBC for cultivation of British cultural values in other societies.

⁶ Likewise other letter says: "I usually sleep in the morning during the month of Ramazan but today I could not sleep and started listening to your service. Your presenter said, 'This is BBC London, it's Tuesday, the 3rd of October'. Why do you read English calendar in Urdu Service, while ignoring the Urdu calendar? It would have been better if you mentioned the date and day in Urdu as well". Mohammad Ali Badra, Koath, Bihar (ACR October 2006). Another document argued: "For some 35 years I have been serving the people in the area. I have some attachment with your service for I found your news impartial. I would like to lodge my complaint to your Urdu, Hindi and Bengali services. You have made these services country specific like, Urdu Service for Pakistan, Hindi Service for India and Bengali Service for Bangladesh. We get very little news regarding the problems facing the Indian Muslims in Urdu service. In Bengali service the news regarding the Bengali speaking people from Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and Orissa is also very little. I am sure that the authorities in the BBC are well aware of the fact that there are more Muslims as well as BBC listeners of Urdu service in India than Pakistan. Whatsoever is the language of Muslims in a particular region, but it is a fact the language of communication in India among the Muslims remains Urdu. Shamim Ahmad, Vaishali, Bihar (ACR Annual 2006).

⁷ See http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/11_november/24/mirza.shtml

The respondents both in Pakistan and Germany opined that BBC Urdu service is more inclined to Indian film industry than Pakistan. They viewed that BBC Urdu Service, especially bburdu.com as an intentional attempt of imposition of Western culture. They viewed that the BBC is giving more coverage to those writers and the so-called intellectuals who are targeting Islamic values. They were referring to Salman Rushdi and Tasleema Nasreen. Arguing their point of view they said:

Aslam: First Mukhtara Mai (*a raped victim in Pakistan*) was given undue coverage in the BBC and now she writes a column for BBC Urdu service...we admit that what happened to Mukhtara Mai was inhumane, but why BBC does not ask Monika Lewinsky to write column for it? Is it not propaganda against Muslims and Pakistani culture?

Ihtesham: BBC is promoting sexuality...

Explaining the reasons for using Pakistani television channels for news, views and entertainment programmes the diasporic group of traders said to the researchers:

Javed: I use Pakistani satellite channels as I can not watch German TV with my children and wife....

Butt: I like Pakistani mass media because it gives greater local information about people and localities that I know...

Mehmood: Pakistani channels present Pakistani culture. BBC and other media also have cultural contents but far less than national Pakistani media....

Jamal: I am interested in religious content that's why I watch only Q TV...

Zahir: At least Pakistani media are not promoting blasphemous writers and artists...

There were also some participants who viewed BBC's reporting of Islamic and Pakistani social values like the issue of Hijab in countries such as France, Norway, Canada and the consequent social and cultural problems as a positive step for socialisation of its consumers in these countries. The Pakistani groups' participants also were of the opinion that Pakistanis should give due respect to the social values of the societies where they live to avoid any unwanted problems for themselves.

The respondents claimed that BBC is tarnishing the image of Pakistan and Islam. In Leipzig group, the participants were critic towards BBC Urdu service. When they were asked that when they were not satisfied with the BBC then why they listen and read its contents. The participants replied that they did so only to know how the international media, especially BBC Urdu service, which is presented in the national language of Pakistan, depict Pakistan. The archival data show:

“On 10th August the drama of defusing a terrorist activities played by Britain has no connection with truth. Instead it is an attempt by Britain and the US to defame Muslims and to divert world's attention from the brutal killings in Lebanon by Israelis. Mohammad Tayyab, Pilibhit, UP (ACR September 2006). *And one other respondent pointed.* If you think you are not better than Hazrat Aisha and Fatima then there is no need of presenting such dramas and movies which are never going to change the minds of people regarding women. It would have been rather better to invite a good lawyer or Islamic scholar to make the people, especially, women aware of their rights. For God's sake don't mislead us”. Engineer Bilal Ahmad, Udampur, Kashmir (ACR Annual 2006).

(iii) BBC and sports coverage

BBC covers a wide range of world sports and has maintained wide audience ship interested in getting information of the world sports. It covers prominent games around the globe and focus on the UK and south Asian games in its Urdu service. “*BBC gives me information on sports, particularly cricket. I love its news and analyses on cricket, said Aslam.* Respondents appreciated the “*khaeel kay medan siay*” a BBC Urdu program.

BBC and crisis situations

Thus, respondents argued that Pakistani private television channels and online Urdu newspapers among the mass media as the best sources of their information on any sort of natural or man-made disasters in Pakistan. Technology-assisted interpersonal communication channels like telephone and e-mail from homeland were also mentioned as important contact vehicles. Telephone call rate from Germany to Pakistan and from Pakistan to Germany is one of the cheapest among all international calls. Secondly, in the recent past mobile telephone technology has boomed in Pakistan. In 2006 the total mobile telephone subscribers here were 48.2 million, while this number rose to 71.2 million in October 2007*. The intra-diasporic communication was viewed as another source of information in crises situations back in the country. The diaspora viewed that BBC Urdu Service was also playing important role in informing them about crisis situations like the October 2005 earthquake, tribal areas, Lal Masjid, Judicial crises and imposition of state of emergency in Pakistan. However, even in such problematic and striking circumstances they mentioned Pakistani online Urdu newspapers and private television channels as their preferred news media. On the other hand, it was found through groups’ interviews in Mardan, and Vehari that *as compared to national mass media BBC Radio was the first and more reliable source of information in national crisis situation for BBC users* Said Muhammad.

Nevertheless, BBC Urdu radio was viewed as the only credible source amongst foreign media after the imposition of the state of emergency in November 2007, when all private local media was ban to report Govt actions. BBC Urdu service increased its time and number of broadcasts from 3 services (Sairbeen, Jehan Numa and Shabnama) to 5 services (two emergency services) which was appreciated by people both in urban and rural areas. During this crisis situation, radio costs were almost doubles in Vehari to listen the foreign media especially BBC and VOA. Dish antenna costs also rose significantly in Lahore and Vehari and Govt of Pakistan impose ban on dish antennas which were aimed to listen Geo, ARY and BBC WS due to ban on cable network. Discussing the role of BBC in crisis situations as under:

Javed: My source of information on issues like Lal Masjid, judiciary crisis, situation in Baluchistan and Waziristan, acts of terrorism has been BBC.....

Jamal: BBC gave significant coverage to judicial crisis in the country.....

Waheed: BBC is giving follow up stories of every important event...

Ghulam: I have been listening BBC Urdu service regularly since the last 30 years ... This has become part of my life ... It educates me. For example, I did not know about “*Gernailee Sarak*”. BBC taught me about it.

Some respondents were impressed with the professional standards of BBC staff. For example one respondent said:

* <http://telecompk.net/service-providers/>

Hussain: BBC provides up to date and fair news. To me it is the most credible and authentic service as it uses the services of various experts like Rahim Ullah Yusufzai's reporting on Afghanistan, Taliban and Afghan issue...

The archival data also show similar pattern. For example, Muhammad Jamal wrote to BBC:

We acknowledge the all-embracing coverage of the BBC Urdu Service about the earthquake affected people after one year. The other local and international media did cover the first anniversary but the way the BBC did we all are grateful. Especially the programme 'Talking Point' with ERRA deputy chairman General Nadim was really very good. In the age of computer and cable TV channels once again people from our area have turned to the radio because of these transmissions" (October 2006 BBC Urdu service ACR).

Discussion and conclusion

Unlike the old perception about media audiences, which viewed that audiences respond to media messages in a uniform way (Lowerry & DeFleur, 1995) our data confirm that consumers responses to media messages are not uniform and immediate rather there are various sociological, and psychological factors that mediate their feedback to media (Bauer1964;Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1982; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Burton, 2005). For example, it is very much clear from the data that those who were less educated, had low income level, living in rural areas and limited access to other mass media perceived BBC Urdu service different than those who were more educated, greater exposure, high income levels, living in urban areas and had the facilities of multiple mass media. The collected data also indicate that respondents were making their own meanings, which exhibited differences from group to group and even from individual to individual. The data rejected the idea of passive audience and confirm the view that audiences are active in their media use behaviour (Katz, Blumer & Gurevitch, 1974; Palmgreen, Wenner & Rosengren, 1985; Littlejohn, 1999; Rubin, 2002) and are decoding media messages in a way that may or may not be in line with desired meaning (Morely, 1992; Power, Kubey & Kioussis, 2002).

Research studies show that diasporic communities use their ethnic media for connectivity with their culture and land (Lee, 2004), and that societies tend to use mass media that connote, interpret, and frame social realities closer to their cultural and social norms and values (Barkho, 2006). In Germany Pakistani community does not own any ethnic mass media however, our study found that Pakistani diasporas are inclined more towards Pakistani satellite television channels, and online newspapers. And these media are keeping them connected more than any other mass medium including BBC Urdu Service.

The collected as well as the archival data show that BBC is playing a significant role in keeping its users informed about overseas Pakistanis, besides giving them information on important issues and events that happen inside Pakistan. Similarly, the data also indicate that Pakistani diasporas in Germany are making use of BBC Urdu Service along with Pakistani mass media for their connectivity with their homeland, people and society. Hence, we can say that BBC Urdu Service is connecting Pakistani diasporas with their country and culture and vice versa. This means BBC is a 'contact zone' for its consumers. The data also reveal that the "war on terror" is negatively reflecting on the BBC. Respondents perceived that being a British news media organisation BBC is framing Taliban, Islamic seminaries negatively so that to build public opinion against them.

The data in both forms indicated that BBC is promoting democratic norms, tolerance, human rights values, and civil liberties. Hence we conclude that BBC Urdu service is a source of ‘public diplomacy’⁸.

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⁸ The word ‘public diplomacy’ refers to “government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television” (U.S. Department of State, *Dictionary of International Relations Terms*, 1987: 85) . Public diplomacy word was used to promote the understanding between the peoples of different domains and diasporas. Therefore, BBC is public broadcast which is using its efforts in professional manners to promote the public diplomacy between the people of Britain, its colonial pasts (like Pakistan and its diasporas).

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