

Peer-Reviewed Original Article

Exploring Journalism's Transformative Roles During Wars and Violent Conflicts

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Abstract: Journalism plays an important part in keeping audiences around the globe informed about conflicts. Scholars have argued, however, that journalism can also prove vital in terms of decreasing conflict intensity. Based on this normative approach, we review literature on journalistic roles and conflict reporting and explore four transformative roles that journalism can play to decrease conflict intensity: (i) informer, (ii) explainer, (iii) moderator and (iv) benefactor. We argue that these roles are key to understanding the cause(s) of the conflict and the impact it has on various groups, as well as for exploring opportunities for peace through dialogue. The implementation of these roles is elaborated on using the prolonged and often violent conflict between India and Pakistan as an example. The potential significance of the roles in terms of their transformative abilities and the need for their empirical analysis is outlined.

Keywords: conflicts; journalism; transformation; peacebuilding; moderation; empowerment

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Acknowledgment

This research and publication are funded by dtec.bw, the Digitalisation and Technology Research Centre of the Bundeswehr, as part of the “Media for Peace” project. dtec.bw is funded by the European Union’s NextGenerationEU programme.

To cite this article: Malik, Muhammad Sultan; Sehl, Annika; Neuberger, Christoph; & Kretzschmar, Sonja (2026). Exploring Journalism’s Transformative Roles During Wars and Violent Conflicts. *Global Media Journal – German Edition*, 16(1), DOI: 10.60678/817v3x25

Introduction

The extent to which journalists should become involved in reporting is a longstanding debate in journalism. According to journalistic principles developed in Western journalism schools and news media organisations, objectivity and neutrality are aspects that are to be upheld during the gathering and dissemination of news (Schudson, 2001). At the same time, there also exists scholarship calling for journalists to act as advocates while reporting crises and conflicts (Galtung, 2003). This debate becomes particularly pronounced in reporting on wars and violent conflicts, as some scholars push for the objective reporting of facts (Loyn, 2007), whereas others believe that news dealing with conflicts *should* entail elements related to peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity, thereby playing a meaningful role in decreasing conflict intensity (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

Communication scholars such as Kempf (2003) and Bläsi (2009) have suggested a systematic approach to conflict reporting, arguing that the role of journalism is not only to inform but also to focus on peacebuilding or conflict resolution and to facilitate gradual democratic transformation. Exploring the role of journalism in conflicts becomes even more relevant when considering the implications of communication technologies in today's digital environment. While digital platforms foster rapid production, sharing and criticism of information by ordinary users and organisations, they face numerous hurdles in flagging disinformation or identifying content lacking necessary context (Augenstein et al., 2025). This becomes particularly important, or dangerous, during violent conflicts because the spread of unverified information carries grave consequences (Katz, 2020), thereby requiring journalistic oversight and intervention to prevent escalation.

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to explore the possible transformative roles of journalism in wars and other violent conflicts. To highlight journalism's transformative potential in conflicts, we review and analyse conflict reporting literature, as well as literature on journalistic roles. We first discuss the divergent approaches of objective journalism and the journalism of attachment in the context of conflict reporting. Next, we explore the impact of conflicts upon established journalistic roles and then introduce the four transformative roles that stem from Hanitzsch and Vos's (2018) functions of journalism when applied to different conflict stages. Concurrently, we contextualise the identified roles by applying them as examples to address the prolonged conflict between India and Pakistan. Finally, we connect the roles with elements from selected journalistic concepts that allow for a clearer distinction and application of the roles in different stages of conflict.

This paper adds to the existing literature on conflict reporting by highlighting the transformative potential of journalism in violent conflicts. On the one hand, this scholarly contribution explores the possibilities of practicing de-escalatory reporting during different conflict stages in the shape of transformative roles; on the other hand, it encourages journalism scholars to analyse the effectiveness and extent of

the applicability of these roles in different wars and violent conflicts around the globe to understand the influence of socio-political settings, as well as the conflict type.

Journalistic Objectivity vs. Journalism of Attachment

The norm of objectivity in journalism dictates refraining from intervention and acting as detached and neutral observers. Objectivity has been interpreted in different ways by different authors. For example, Schudson (2001) described the practice of objective reporting as the separation of facts from values “and to report only the facts” (p. 21), hence clearly separating fact-based reporting from commentary. Tuchman (1972, p. 677) regarded the practice of objective news reporting as “strategic rituals” that journalists, at least in the American context, followed to justify the work they produced and to thwart any criticism, for example, by offering an equal representation of various sides. In his introductory text on practical journalism, La Roche (2008) distinguished between fact-centred outer objectivity and value-based inner objectivity, both influencing the collection and reporting of news. Boudana (2011) considered objectivity in journalism to be a practice shaped by a journalist’s strategic decisions and the environment in which they operated, arguing that the norm is “grasped not as an absolute but as a performance” (p. 393).

In addition to delving into its different meanings, scholars have debated the desirability and attainability of journalistic objectivity. For example, in her research focusing on perceptions and attitudes towards objectivity among German journalists and academics, Post (2015) highlighted that objectivity was desired and considered attainable, although journalists who were part of the survey remained sceptical of adopting systematic methods for achieving it. Instead of treating objectivity as a mythical absolute, Neuberger (2017) suggested the adoption of pragmatic measures, such as verification, openness to correction and transparency about uncertainty, that could lead to objective news reporting. Thomas (2019) pointed out that despite its continued appeal over the decades, socio-political settings, media systems and technological changes greatly impacted the extent to which objectivity could be attained in news reporting.

The challenges surrounding objective reporting continue to manifest in modern scholarship. Velloso’s (2026) analysis of metajournalistic discourse around pursuing objectivity at the professional level highlights that while journalists still value fact-based and accurate reporting, they consider pure objectivity as an illusion and call for recognition of journalists’ standpoints, that is, their backgrounds and surrounding environment, which influence the work they produce. Likewise, audience-based research has indicated that relying only on norms of the profession that call for strict neutrality and for pushing objective facts at all times could widen the gap between journalism and audiences, as the latter expect news reporting that caters to their emotions in addition to delivering honest and complete accounts of events

(Mellado & Gajardo, 2026). Similar observations can be made in the context of the Global South, where staunch objectivity remains difficult to implement due to journalists' tendency towards interventionist roles despite their commitment to truth-oriented and fact-based reporting (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Mutsvairo et al., 2021). Such distinctive and divergent attitudes towards concepts deemed "universal" have resulted in increased calls from academic circles to closely inspect individual cases and their understanding of journalistic objectivity (Fahmy & Elhamy, 2025, p. 3).

Objectivity can be a particularly difficult aspect to practice for conflict reporters, as they confront pressures of different kinds from different entities. From aligning their reporting with the state narrative (be it the state they represent or the one they are based in) to balancing between the viewpoints of various actors involved, maintaining objectivity in conflict reporting can prove to be a tough ask (Cohen, 2010; Jensen, 1992). Somewhat distinctive from journalistic objectivity is Bell's (1998a, 1998b) concept of the *journalism of attachment*, which calls upon journalists to rethink the traditional conflict-reporting approach. Instead of presenting all sides as equals in a conflict, the journalism of attachment urges moral and ethical (re)considerations by focusing on the injustices taking place. Rather than acting as passive observers and advancing elite narratives, Bell pushes reporters to highlight the toll that conflicts place upon ordinary citizens. Empirical research in this regard has shown that conflict reporters at times tend to act as attached journalists through increased involvement if the conflict is of a severe nature, such as genocide (Ruigrok, 2008).

The Impact of Conflicts upon Journalistic Roles

Communication scholars have underscored the importance of de-westernizing journalism scholarship to better understand context-specific distinctions, arguing that the meaning and purpose of journalism vary across systems (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). Some of the empirical efforts that have focused on analysing journalistic roles beyond the West indicate several factors that directly influence journalistic thought and output. For instance, Mellado et al. (2017) argued that differences in power structures, media freedom, professionalization and market focus dictated the range of professional roles played by journalists across Latin America. This also holds true in conflict settings, as conflicts are deemed extraordinary circumstances, and their influence on journalistic thought and output is therefore also unique and multifaceted (Ross, 2006).

Research has indicated that journalists perform several professional roles at the same time while reporting conflicts. In addition to providing timely information to audiences and acting as watchdogs, conflict reporters attempt to serve as advocates of peace to bridge differences (Şahin, 2022). This idea that the role of a conflict reporter not only involves providing updates but also includes finding paths towards peace resonates in conflict reporting literature (e.g., Prager & Hameleers, 2021;

Şahin, 2022). This is indicative of the additional responsibility journalists see themselves assuming while reporting from conflict zones and further highlights the flexible nature of journalistic roles (Raemy & Vos, 2021). Quite often, the toll of witnessing conflicts first-hand nudges journalists to take on additional roles, such as that of an advocate and interpreter, in addition to fulfilling the traditional roles they are expected to perform (Ojala et al., 2018). Moreover, factors such as professional expectations and personal experiences also influence conflict reporting (Fahmy et al., 2024).

It can therefore be discerned that traditional journalistic roles could expand during wars and violent conflicts to explore peacebuilding measures. Journalism scholarship, however, falls short of concretely conceptualizing roles that specifically cater to conflict reporting. Although some suggestions have been put forth to address non-violent conflicts in democratic societies through constructive reporting (Rojas-Calderón, 2024), how journalists can act professionally to potentially lessen conflict intensity in the case of violent conflicts remains an unexplored avenue. The next section introduces the transformative roles that journalism can play during wars and violent conflicts that stem from the functions of journalism when applied to conflict settings.

The Transformative Roles of Journalism in Wars and Violent Conflicts

While the literature introduced in the previous section discusses the impact of conflicts on journalists and their roles, this section takes a normative approach to highlight different aspects of journalism practice that can be utilised to lessen conflict intensity. We utilise the functions of journalism outlined by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018), in conjunction with the literature on conflict reporting, to conceptualise the four transformative roles of journalism in wars and other violent conflicts: informer, explainer, moderator and benefactor. We further suggest the application of the outlined roles based on a temporal distribution of wars and conflicts (i.e., pre-conflict, active conflict and post-conflict phases).

Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) conceptualised the core functions of journalism and related journalistic roles that cater to the domains of politics and the everyday life of audiences. Within the domain of politics, Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) see journalism fulfilling six distinct functions within society with regards to its information needs: (i) informational-instructive, (ii) analytical-deliberative, (iii) critical-monitorial, (iv) advocative-radical, (v) developmental-educative and (vi) collaborative-facilitative. Various factors dictate the practice or prevalence of any one or more of these functions of journalism in given circumstances and socio-political contexts.

Several scholarly works have utilised Hanitzsch and Vos's (2018) approach to understand the practice of journalism in different parts of the globe. For instance, in the acclaimed *Worlds of Journalism* study (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), this typology

serves as the theoretical backbone of the project and allows communication scholars to understand patterns and highlight nuances associated with journalism practice around the world. Moreover, scholars have added to this typology through closer investigations of individual cases. In his analysis of journalism in post-communist Bulgaria, Marinos (2025) built upon Hanitzsch and Vos's typology, highlighting that in addition to fulfilling traditional journalistic roles expected from journalists in the West, Bulgarian journalists actively adopted the role of an advocate for the people by bringing up their grievances to authorities, thereby maintaining a connection with the country's socialist past.

For our conceptualization of the transformative roles of journalism in wars and other violent conflicts, we restrict our analysis to the functions of journalism that centre around politics (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018), arguing that wars and conflicts have elements of politics associated with them and are eminently linked with political choices (Jackson & Morelli, 2007). Furthermore, to illustrate the application of the transformative roles, we use selected examples of reporting based on the conflict between India and Pakistan. The two South Asian neighbours have engaged in numerous wars and brief armed confrontations on multiple occasions since their independence from British rule in August 1947. Both countries have blamed each other for interference in internal matters, such as promoting extremism and separatism and for backing acts of terrorism (Michael, 2018). The latest armed conflict between the two countries took place in May 2025, when India attacked Pakistan after alleging that Pakistan had backed terrorists who attacked civilians in the Pahalgam region of Indian-administered Kashmir, a claim that Pakistan rejected (Clary, 2025). A ceasefire agreement, warmly welcomed by the international community, halted any further aggression between the two, although both sides remained wary of the other's commitment to upholding it (Bajpaee, 2025). Using the conflict between India and Pakistan as an example, we intend to illustrate the role that journalism can play in contextualizing historical grievances, moderating reporting to ensure that the other side is heard and undertaking peacebuilding efforts that could improve ties between groups present on opposite sides.

Informer Role

During conflicts, information circulates rapidly and intensely. However, media attention is selective. This means that some conflicts receive high coverage, while most conflicts in the world remain largely unreported (Hawkins, 2011). Individuals directly trapped or otherwise affected by in violent conflicts, as well as those indirectly affected by it in other corners of the globe, experience a constant demand for real-time updates – a need that was initially met by the emergence of around-the-clock broadcast news and is currently sustained by digital media platforms. On the other hand, commercial news outlets also compete to be the first to deliver breaking information to their audiences, frequently prioritising immediacy over accuracy. In the volatile context of conflict zones, this compromise often results in grave consequences (Hamilton, 2007).

It needs to be considered that conflicts serve as a litmus test for journalists – testing their allegiance to a country or a cause while also expecting them to report truthfully (Allan & Zelizer, 2004). Such a test of loyalty could see journalists letting go of their impartiality and professionalism while opting for a biased approach to conflict reporting that falls in line with the accepted narrative. This ultimately results in news media advancing sensational discourse during conflicts (Joseph, 2014), which heightens ethnic or nationalistic sentiments among audiences. Against this backdrop, the *informer* role of journalism in violent conflicts requires news media practitioners to prioritise the timely dissemination of accurate information – a core responsibility. Acting ethically and in line with basic journalistic principles, journalists reporting on wars and other conflicts need to hold steadfast to the delivery of verified information while avoiding sensationalism or jingoistic rhetoric.

The *informer* role stems from the informational-instructive and critical-monitorial functions of journalism (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018); it emphasises the provision of accurate information to audiences throughout the conflict in addition to requiring journalists to closely examine the claims made by different sides involved in confrontation. In certain cases, the spread of disinformation during conflicts could even be state-backed to rally the public behind the official take on the matter (Asmolov, 2018; Jones, 2024). Acting upon this role has become particularly important nowadays, as the digital sphere battles the heavy influx of disinformation created and spread with the convenience offered by artificial intelligence tools (Nasiri & Hashemzadeh, 2025).

In this respect, in addition to delivering timely updates about the conflict, news media need to assume the added responsibility of actively fact-checking any falsehoods that have made their way into public discourse. The *informer* role, therefore, remains relevant at any stage of the conflict – from highlighting simmering tensions to reporting active confrontation followed by providing updates on a ceasefire agreement, delivering verified information to audiences around the clock will always remain one of the basic yet most important functions of journalism.

The manifestation of the *informer* role in the India–Pakistan conflict would include the delivery of timely and verified information regarding any escalation between the two. Particularly during the active conflict phase, this role would entail the dissemination of verified updates, minus the elements of sensationalism or jingoism. Acting on this role further entails informing audiences about what the other side has to say and about any ongoing negotiations and potential ceasefire agreements, along with addressing claims of possible violations to lessen conflict-related anxiety.

Most media outlets belonging to India and Pakistan could be expected to deliver timely updates regarding any confrontation between the two, but these would likely be closely aligned with state narratives based on the hostile media policies that both countries have maintained against one another for years (Bose, 2011). Acting upon the *informer* role could be expected from news outlets such as *Dawn* (from

Pakistan) and *The Hindu* (from India), which are known for their non-sensational approach to conflict coverage (Khan & Khan, 2020).

Explainer Role

One of the relevant tasks of journalism during wars and violent conflicts, in addition to the timely dissemination of accurate information, is to help audiences understand the underlying factors (i.e., an explanation of *why* events have unfolded as they have). News media often narrow their focus during conflicts, prioritizing only the events taking place in real time and churning out simplistic statements from the socio-political or military elites, along with publishing bare figures (Bennett, 1990; Hallin, 1986). In addition to reporting the number of dead or injured, or highlighting financial losses incurred, it is equally important to ponder and answer the question “How did things get here?”

The development of conflict consciousness among news media practitioners has been regarded as a key competency, as it enables journalists to not only report the problems but also to dig deeper and focus on (potential) causes (Howard, 2015), particularly in the case of prolonged conflicts. In their investigation of journalistic role perceptions in selected conflicts, Lohner et al. (2019, p. 66) determined the “analytical role” to be among the most important ones played by journalists, as they go to great lengths to contextualise the challenges that different communities face, along with reporting on the way forward. What we label the *explainer* role of journalism in conflicts focuses on contextualizing and elaborating on the root causes of conflicts for audiences. Fulfilling this role means that journalists need to emphasise aspects such as historic enmities or injustices, past alliances, the demographic make-up of a society and the imbalanced distribution of resources that may contribute to discord.

Based on Hanitzsch and Vos’s (2018) typology, the *explainer* role relates to the analytical-deliberative function of journalism; it is concerned with unearthing the historical roots of contention that make lasting peace a challenge. Giving a detailed account of events and their causes has become ever so relevant in today’s fast-paced digital media environment, which has caused attention spans to shrink dramatically (Baumgartner et al., 2025; Firth et al., 2020). Thorough research and an elaborative, multi-perspective presentation of facts are necessary in conflict reporting. Although relevant in its application throughout the different conflict stages, the explainer role is particularly important during the pre-conflict and active conflict phases to inform audiences about the conflict’s background, as well as the different aspects pertaining to it.

The *explainer* role of journalism in the India–Pakistan conflict would focus on the historical, political and administrative grievances between the two sides since their independence from British rule in 1947, how both countries have fuelled insurgency in the other’s territory in the past and, importantly, how ordinary Indians and

Pakistanis are affected by the conflict, particularly the people in the Kashmir region. An example of the explainer role in action would be a timeline of conflicts between both countries published by Al-Jazeera (2025), highlighting the tensions that have persisted over decades.

Moderator Role

Moderation is an important service that journalists render when addressing sensitive or polarizing issues. Journalistic moderation is an active effort to oversee and promote civilised discourse between publics while ensuring a balanced representation of multiple perspectives (Meyer & Carey, 2014). This role is particularly on display on journalistic news websites and social media posts, as well as during televised debates; U.S. presidential debates serve as a prime example of an event in which journalists – acting as moderators – carefully shape discussions (Turcotte, 2015). However, this exercise could result in cacophony and chaos in other instances due to the moderator's inability to properly oversee discussions between opponents or because of the presumed commercial interests of the broadcaster in raising controversial topics (Goovaerts & Turkenburg, 2023).

Fulfilling the *moderator* role in violent conflicts means that journalists should enable the respectful exchange of views by those representing different sides, as well as explore various trust-building and peace-promoting measures. Acting upon the fundamentals of deliberation (Rinke, 2016), this role demands that media practitioners conduct discussions in a rational and composed manner, without agitating or vilifying any of the discussants. From the performative aspect, beyond highlighting differences in perspective, moderation could seek common ground between opponents and enable them to bring up workable solutions. In the context of active or ongoing conflicts, the moderator should not simply oversee the concerns of the discussants being addressed but also needs to prioritise discourse regarding the necessity and requirements of lasting peace.

The *moderator* role stems from the developmental-educative function of journalism (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018); it demands active intervention from journalists to discuss the necessity of lasting peace and its requirements with the entities involved. Enabling representatives of different sides in a conflict to engage respectfully with each other while ensuring one's own neutrality is challenging. It also needs to be considered that effective journalistic deliberation is context-based and relies on the media system (Wessler, 2008). In highly polarised and non-democratic societies, the act of balanced moderation can be met with socio-political rebuke (Wetzstein, 2010). This makes it all the more necessary to expose audiences to a multitude of perspectives, thereby enabling them to view the other side as “human” and to understand their concerns. Enabling opposing sides in a conflict to engage respectfully and fairly without creating false balance is challenging. This is particularly difficult when opposing perspectives are given equal representation or legitimacy despite clear asymmetries between the position of the oppressor and the victim. Neuberger and Kapern

(2013) saw this not only as an issue that concerns journalism practice but also as one that concerns academia; thus, they emphasise the importance of context-sensitivity when evaluating different entities involved in conflicts along with their positions. Focusing on perspectives related to the sides involved is relevant throughout the conflict but becomes particularly important during the active conflict phase to ensure representation of the affected groups, as well as in post-conflict settings to address persisting grievances or to enhance cooperation.

The role of journalism as *moderator* in the India–Pakistan conflict would involve discussions with South Asian academics or historians, statesmen and sociocultural figures about trust-building measures that both sides could take to ensure peace and stability in the region. Some aspects that could be highlighted in this regard are the commonalities shared by people from both sides, such as a shared history, culture and traditions, as well as the different challenges they face. An example of the *moderator* role in action is the Deutsche Welle broadcast “*Aao Baat Karein*” (Hindi/Urdu for “Let’s talk”), which is a show co-hosted by a Pakistani and an Indian journalist that focuses on topics relevant to both countries and invites guests from both sides to have a respectful discussion (Ebbighausen, 2024). Particularly with regard to the May 2025 escalation, a podcast conducted by Ramsha Jahangir (2025) on the topic of disinformation and fact-checking during this confrontation, which features experts from both sides, serves as another example of a respectful exchange of perspectives on mutual challenges in the digital sphere.

Benefactor Role

Following the timely and balanced reporting of events during the active conflict phase, journalism still has contributions to make once belligerency subsides (i.e., during the post-conflict phase). These contributions not only involve a fact-based review of developments that transpired during active confrontation but also the need to focus on enhancing social cohesion at a time when many have endured great losses (Orgeret, 2016; Wolfsfeld, 1998). Several external factors come into play in determining the extent to which mediated intervention in post-conflict social uplifting could be successful; key relevant factors in this regard include the nature and the impact of the conflict, the socio-political landscape in which the media operates and the media’s financial capabilities and editorial capacities (Harrison & Pukallus, 2023; Legatis, 2015).

Scholarship on post-conflict journalism highlights that the profession can contribute to the greater good of society by going beyond its traditional role as an information disseminator and giving voice to those impacted by the conflict (Idris, 2020), along with exploring paths to reconciliation and societal rebuilding (Levesque & Onguny, 2024). It can therefore be argued that journalism can play a *benefactor* role in post-conflict settings through highlighting grievances, empowering affected communities and emphasizing stories of resilience and recovery. As information related to conflicts is mostly negative in nature, thus dampening the moods of audiences

and making them averse to the news (Villi et al., 2022), the emphasis on tales of resilience along with individual and communal achievements in the aftermath of conflicts becomes vital to spreading hope. The focus on positivity in the news uplifts audiences' spirits and enables them to strive towards a better future in the wake of the calamity they have been exposed to (Hassan, 2023).

The *benefactor* role finds its basis in the collaborative-facilitative function of journalism (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018) in the sense that journalists highlight post-conflict redevelopment initiatives but do not place themselves in service to the authorities through uncritical appraisal or by shying away from necessary criticism. The advent of digital communication platforms can play a vital role in post-conflict societal rebuilding. The relevance of digital media use by populations engulfed in conflict for information dissemination, connectivity and organisation has been well researched (Castells, 2012; Tufekci, 2017). Beyond this, the use of digital platforms in post-conflict settings also serves to empower communities, as they can share experiences, seek support and find solutions to imminent issues (Baytiyeh, 2019). Journalistic intervention in this regard carries the potential to enhance outreach along with organizing the communication being conducted, thus catering to the needs of affected communities.

An example of the *benefactor* role in the context of the India–Pakistan conflict is the initiative “*Aman Ki Asha*” (Hindi/Urdu for “Hope for Peace”) launched in 2010 by the Jang Group and The Times of India, two leading media outlets from Pakistan and India, respectively. The campaign was hailed as historic in terms of being “one of the most visible people-to-people initiatives between India and Pakistan” (Rid, 2020, p. 3). *Aman Ki Asha* aimed at strengthening ties between the two countries at different levels – between members of the business community, among artists and journalistic circles and among the youth from both countries (Rid, 2020). Through this joint venture, conferences were organised in which relevant topics were addressed, including issues with visa issuance, water scarcity, the dilemma of cross-border security and others. Despite its early success in developing initial contact between different groups from both sides through perception redevelopment, the campaign came to a halt after a few years in the wake of rising cross-border terrorism and extremism (Rauf, 2025). Nevertheless, the traction gained by *Aman Ki Asha* serves as a clear example of the constructive role that journalism can play in bridging divides and enabling collaboration.

Connecting Journalism’s Transformative Roles with Journalistic Concepts

Based on their focus, selected indicators from various *types* or *concepts* of journalism can be associated with the different transformative roles. In addition to entailing the characteristics of quality journalism – including, but not limited to, timely reporting, truth orientation and impartiality (Bachmann et al., 2022) – the *informer*

role corresponds well with elements belonging to peace journalism, including proactive news reporting, people-oriented news reporting, highlighting causes and consequences and reporting the aftermath of the conflict (Galtung, 2003; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

The related but distinct concept of conflict-sensitive journalism connects with the *explainer* role, as it prioritises journalists' conflict consciousness, enabling them to contextualise the conflict along with its causes and impact for audiences (Howard, 2004, 2015). Furthermore, the concept of slow journalism, which prioritises the publishing of quality journalistic content following extensive research (Greenberg, 2012), is well suited for this role.

The concept known as deliberative journalism can be attributed to the *moderator* role during conflicts due to its focus on advancing a respectful and rational discussion, which could facilitate the highlighting of diverse perspectives, in addition to allowing the public exchange of ideas between adversaries (Löb & Wessler, 2021; Wessler & Rinke, 2014). Lastly, the concepts of constructive journalism and citizen journalism can be connected with the *benefactor* role due to their emphasis on solutions and positivity and their ability to enable ordinary citizens to share their experiences (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; Wall, 2019).

As the four transformative roles of journalism introduced in this text cater to different conflict stages (i.e., pre-conflict, active conflict and post-conflict), it needs to be highlighted that the roles often overlap in terms of their implementation in different conflict stages due to their focus. For instance, the *informer* role remains relevant throughout the conflict, whereas the *explainer* role is of particular importance during the early and active conflict phases. In terms of their application, it can be suggested that certain types of media (print, broadcast and digital) are better suited to fulfil certain roles than others, although overlaps can be expected here as well. Given their wide and immediate reach, initial updates and insights surrounding conflicts can be disseminated via broadcast and digital news outlets (particularly through their social media channels), thus acting upon the *informer* role.

In-depth analysis regarding causes, impact and potential solutions to the conflict – the core of the *explainer* role – can be introduced through print media but can be supplemented by online commentaries, such as blog posts or detailed videos. The *moderator* role can be best fulfilled by inviting representatives from different parties to the conflict for a discussion, for instance, on online podcasts or on mainstream broadcast media to highlight various perspectives, seek common ground and identify mutually acceptable solutions.

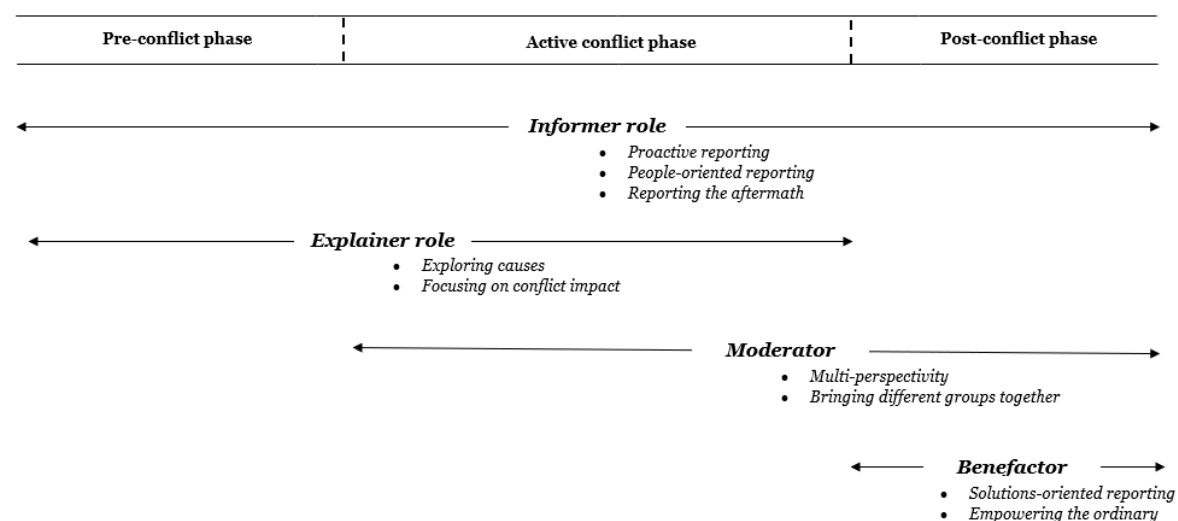
Lastly, in post-conflict settings, groups of people can be connected, and positive news can be spread by the different media types based upon their focus (i.e., publishing detailed interviews in print and digital media that showcase individual

resilience or broadcasting the rebuilding efforts of various communities), thus fulfilling the *benefactor* role for conflict transformation.

Figure 1 offers a representation of the four roles during different conflict stages, highlighting the most relevant elements from the various journalistic concepts that best cater to them.

Figure 1

The transformative roles of journalism in different conflict stages



Discussion

This paper explored the different transformative roles of journalism that are relevant to decreasing conflict intensity. The various roles mentioned in this paper highlight how journalism can educate audiences about the causes and the many complexities associated with violent conflicts, initiate meaningful discussions that put forth different perspectives and explore potential solutions, and empower those affected by the belligerency.

Departing from the premise of the journalism of attachment – a concept that urges journalists to go beyond simply reporting developments related to conflicts to highlighting their psychological toll and impact on various groups (Bell, 1998b) – we looked into the impact that wars and conflicts have on established journalistic roles. In particular, we used the typology offered by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) that explores the functions of journalism and applied it to war and conflict settings to understand which functions are best suited to the different stages of a conflict (i.e., pre-conflict, active conflict and post-conflict). Through this approach, we were able to highlight four distinct transformative roles that journalism can adopt to decrease conflict intensity and enhance social cohesion: (i) *informer*, (ii) *explainer*, (iii) *moderator* and (iv) *benefactor*.

Each role is distinct in terms of its focus and application. The *informer* role focuses on the timely and accurate dissemination of information throughout the conflict while avoiding any sensationalism or jingoism in the reporting. The *explainer* role provides an in-depth analysis of the causes of the conflict, shedding light on the responsibilities of the entities involved and their impact on the conflict. Understanding the conflict from the perspectives of the different groups involved and discussing mutually agreeable solutions with their representatives form the crux of the *moderator* role.

Lastly, as normalcy sets in during the post-conflict stage, the *benefactor* role sees journalism bringing various segments of society together, empowering them to share their stories and making them feel heard. To demonstrate the application of the transformative roles, we applied them to the conflict between India and Pakistan that has been ongoing for decades and often involves armed confrontation between the two. We provided examples of news reporting on the India–Pakistan conflict that align with the transformative roles and discussed how the journalism-based initiatives “*Aao Baat Karein*” and “*Aman Ki Asha*” illustrate the potential of collaborative ventures that foster peace between the two neighbours.

While acknowledging that the universal implementation of the roles identified in this paper comes with challenges, we hope that this approach of combining scholarship based on journalistic roles with established journalistic concepts will help realise the potential of journalism for conflict transformation. Future scholarship could delve deeper into exploring the roles identified in this paper by empirically analysing their presence (or absence) in the publications of local or international news media outlets. Such analyses could reveal key characteristics associated with conflict reporting in different media systems across the globe (e.g., to what extent is it possible or even allowed to act upon the *moderator* role in the given sociopolitical settings by inviting guests that represent opposite sides in a conflict and holding a respectful, constructive discussion). Moreover, a scholarly investigation of this nature could also be important from the perspective of understanding the focus of individual news media outlets (i.e., whether they are inclined towards to fulfill only the detached observer role of journalism by simply reporting the developments taking place or whether they actively include elements in their news reporting that advance the conflict consciousness of their audiences and explore various avenues towards peace).

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