

The Personality of Journalists in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Following on from Henningham's (1997) inquiry into the personality of Australian journalists, an attempt is made here to provide some insight into the characteristic tendencies of journalists in Bangladesh. Eysenck's test of three personality dimensions was applied to a sample of 100 Bangladeshi journalists from various media organizations in the country. This study, which uses an extensive questionnaire on personality assessment, found Bangladeshi news personnel to be significantly less psychoticic than the general people. However, on the question of Extraversion and Neuroticism, the news workers were found not to be significantly different from most people. No significant difference was found on the 'lie' scale, which indicates a respondent's tendency to dissimulate, between the journalists and the whole population.

Key words: Personality, journalists, Bangladesh

Introduction

The authors of textbooks on journalism over the past years well have focused on various features of journalists' attributes. From psychological point of view, some of those attributes clearly conform to certain personality traits. Harris and Johnson pointed out 'an aggressively inquiring mind' as inevitable in a reporter. They also suggest a flexible and sociable personality as a newsman's qualification: 'Unless he is a "mixer", the reporter can scarcely enjoy or profit by the multitudinous personal contacts which constitute his news sources.'

There are also some Bengali sources where journalists' attributes have been observed in a similar vein. According to Salam and Roy, all of those who perform the act of reporting have to possess an out-going nature. Intimacy with so many news sources will not develop other than by a reporter's owning extraverted character. Roy elsewhere also emphasized some other attributes of newsmen, such as sociability and friendliness.

These abovementioned characteristics usually suggest the psychologist's personality trait of extraversion/introversion -- where the introvert person's values and activities revolve around solitary reflective behaviour, while the extravert is an out-going person who obtains his satisfactions from social interactions. Hence, the personality trait of extraversion would seem to be a prime need in a journalist.

On another note, Mencher observed 'composure' as a useful trait of newspeople as they are obliged to complete their task despite deadline pressure. Composure usually could signify the mental state of emotional stability, which is opposite to psychologists' personality trait of neuroticism.

Olson, as cited in Campbell and Wolseley, figured out the occupation of journalism in the form of varying in character as opposed to routine mental, mechanical, or physical work. Olson argued in continuation that the work of a journalist is pre-dominantly intellectual; it requires the consistent exercise of discretion and judgement as opposed to work subject to active direction and supervision. In addition, the psychological impacts streaming from strict deadline pressure and immediate public-evaluation make the occupation more difficult to carry on. Taking such a view into consideration, personality might play a vital role in understanding news workers' traits and motivations. Looking at journalists' personality could help fathom our understanding of the news disseminators' occupational capabilities.

Journalists' socio-economic conditions or their psychological dispositions are not very common fields of study in Bangladesh. There appear to be two main studies:

Kamal, on behalf of The Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB), did a large nationwide survey of newspaper journalists' situation. This study mainly concentrated on the social and economic conditions of newspaper workers in six divisional cities of the country. Nevertheless, the PIB survey focused on just a few psychological factors, i.e.- occupation preferences, job expectation, and professional values.

A master's thesis was completed by a student of Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka, focusing upon journalists' perception of their job situation and satisfaction. Along with various other findings, this study revealed that journalists' job satisfaction depends on job security and it correlates to their level of education and monthly income.

The scene in the international arena is not far different. As Henningham searched out the evidences of research into American news people's demographic, socio-economic and educational background, annexing their professional values and ideological dispositions, but excluding their personality and other psychological variables. Henningham then proceeded to fill this gap somewhat by applying personality tests to an Australian sample. This study found that Australian journalists are significantly more extraverted than their countrymen, while no significant

difference was found on neuroticism between Australian news people and the country's whole population. In a country of developing democracy like Bangladesh, media play a significant role as a linkage between government and people. So it might be worthwhile to look at the attitudes and motivations of the members of the fourth estate of this South-Asian developing country also.

Definitions: Personality happens to be a most difficult concept to define with any degree of consensus. Indeed, most textbook discussion on this obscurity of definition end with some statement to the effect that the meaning of the term personality depends on who is using it. However, it is common to define personality as those stable characteristics of individual's behaviour that distinguishes him from others. Hilgard and Atkinson defined personality as the individual and the unique organization that characterize him and his activities.

There are many approaches to describing personality. Some psychologists prefer an analysis of personality in terms of cognition, while some others emphatically use the concept of motivation to the same effect. The phenomenologically oriented personologist places primary emphasis on the meaning of behaviour, as the person is aware of those meaning at any given point. However, analyzing personality as behaviour traits has been seen as a 'common sense' approach. Measuring personality and predicting behaviour thus go hand in hand according to trait approach. Leading trait theorists in this mould are, among others, Allport, Cattell and Eysenck. One of the most eminent psychologists of the last century H.J.Eysenck used factor analysis to reduce the thousands of words describing individual's behavior and cut them down to only three basic dimensions: introversion-extraversion, emotional stability-emotional instability (which he calls 'neuroticism') and tough mindedness-tender mindedness (which he calls 'psychoticism').

Extraversion is the trait, which is central to current conceptualization of personality. Unlike popular perception, this trait has been observed by the psychologists in a more complex pattern. The typical extravert is, according to EPQ (Eysenck Personality Questionnaire), sociable, carefree, easygoing, optimistic, and generally an impulsive individual. He craves excitement, takes chances and tends to be aggressive. McCrae and Costa Jr. in their Five Factor theory, added two traits associated with extraversion: frank and talkative.

Although the nature of the trait of extraversion changes across different theorists' models, Watson and Clark pointed out that six facets have been included at one point or another in the different models of extraversion. The six facets are: venturesome (feelings of excitement seeking and desire for change), affiliation (feelings of warmth and gregariousness), positive affectivity (feelings of joy and enthusiasm), energy (feeling lively and active), ascendance (feeling dominant or being an exhibitionist) and ambition (valuing achievement and endurance).

Introversion, the mirror opposite of extraversion, has been identified by McCrae and Costa Jr as quiet, reserved, shy, and unsociable. According to the EPQ, the typical introvert is quiet, retiring sort of person, introspective, fond of books rather than people; he is reserved and distant except to intimate friends. He does not like excitement, takes matters of everyday life with proper seriousness, likes a well-ordered mode of life and seldom behaves in an aggressive manner.

Neuroticism, the second dimension, embraces at one end people who tend to be moody, touchy, anxious, or restless, and at the other people who earn such description as stable, calm, carefree, even tempered, and reliable. To describe neuroticism, McCrae and Costa Jr use defining adjectives, such as angry, anxious, depressed and to describe emotional stability, Norman uses adjectives like calm, relaxed, and stable.

Eysenck and Eysenck also have demonstrated that the aforementioned dimensions are unrelated, so that any individual may be a neurotic introvert, a neurotic extravert, a stable introvert, or a stable extravert.

Eysenck also recognized a third significant personality factor, which he labeled psychoticism. An adult high P-scorer may be described as solitary, troublesome, reckless, lacking in empathy and feeling, heedless of danger, cruel and inhumane, hostile to others, have a degree of inappropriate emotional expression, and liking for odd and unusual things.

Eysenck's Approach to Personality Factors: Eysenck theory posits three specific personality factors - Extraversion (E), Neuroticism (N) and Psychoticism (P). Apart from these three basic personality dimensions, this approach includes a 'lie' scale, which indicates an individual's tendency to dissimulate. In this scale personality score is measured on the basis of an elaborate questionnaire known as the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ), which consists of a number of items requiring 'Yes' or 'No' responses.

The items of the EPQ have been fully re-analyzed in many countries with a view to verifying that the scales apply in indigenous cultures and that the items are appropriate cross-culturally. Anisur Rahman of the Clinical Psychology Department at the University of Dhaka, and S.B.G. Eysenck developed the Bangladeshi version of the E.P.Q. in 1980 -- translated into Bengali and standardized in Bangladesh. It was verified that the scales in curtailed form i.e. 21, 16, 22, & 19 for P, E, N, & L respectively, apply in this culture. The reliabilities were all > 0.7. Rahman determined the Bangladeshi population (separately for male and female) mean scores on P, E, N, & L, and corresponding standard deviations. Rahman then applied the EPQ (Bangladeshi version) to compare the personality

dimensions of female criminals and drug-addicts in Bangladesh with those of the normative group. Rahman and Masud also investigated the correlation between personality and academic achievement using the same scales. The aforementioned studies stand by Furnham's observation in which he found that although Eysenck theory had been applied to a wide range of activities including criminality, sex, smoking, health and learning, less work had been done with this approach on occupation behaviour. However, Henningham cited some of the evidences of the application of Eysenck's theory in the occupational sphere: Failure rates among trainee pilots are four times as common among neurotic introverts than among stable introverts. Successful businessmen in the United Kingdom are more likely to be stable introverts, while creative painters and sculptors tend to be neurotic introverts. Accident prone bus drivers have been found to be neurotic extraverts.

Method: The personality measurement approach developed by psychologist H.J. Eysenck was applied in this study to a sample of journalists in Bangladesh concentrated within two major cities of the country, Dhaka and Chittagong. In order to facilitate proportional representation of different news-beat reporters and desk workers involved in different tasks of entire news editing and news producing process, judgment sampling method was opted to conduct the study. This all-section representation could have been difficult in other sampling methods, e.g. random sampling.

Participants: A total of 100 journalists, 50 reporters and 50 desk workers, took part as respondents. Among them, 87 respondents are male and 13 are female. The reason female respondents came out in a low frequency is because the number of full-time female journalists in the country is not high enough. Out of a thousand people engaged in the journalism profession, only a few dozen women are working as news personnel. The samples ranged in age between 23 to 62, their average age was 32, average experience in journalism field was of 12 years and average income was 1,50,000 Tk. per annum.

The reporters in the samples were the incumbents of different news beats, such as politics, economy, crime, government offices, women and children, health, food and agriculture, energy, culture, and sports. On the other hand, those who were considered desk workers in the samples were news editors, joint-news editors, news producers, and sub-editors. The journalists, a few of whom were interviewed at their home, were the staffs of 11 leading national dailies (eight published from Dhaka and three published from Chittagong), two news agencies (BSS & UNB) and two leading electronic media (government owned BTV and recently defunct private channel ETV). The newspapers are-Dhaka based 'Ittefaq', 'Prothom Alo', 'Jugantor', 'Sangbad', 'Bhorer Kagoj', 'The Daily Star', 'The Bangladesh Observer', 'The Daily Independent', and Chittagong based 'Purbakone', 'Azadi', and 'Naya Bangla'.

The journalists working in these dailies, together with the newsmen from aforementioned TV channels and news agencies, do enjoy higher status in general view. Considering the competition at the time of recruitment in the media organizations, these journalists might be certified as the most efficient and successful newsmen in Bangladesh. Thus inquiring into the personalities of these samples might provide us with a relatively clearer picture of the personality profiles of full-time professional journalists in Bangladesh.

The Survey: The respondents were approached by the researcher through personal contacts. The researcher moved about from office to office of media organizations, and approached the news workers in various ways - e.g. through a media authority, personal relationship and being introduced to a new face by someone who was known to the researcher. During the survey, which took place throughout a major portion of the year 2001 as part of a larger study, the respondents were administered the EPQ (Bangladeshi version). Another questionnaire was placed before the samples regarding their biographic details and respective journalism careers. Although three of the journalists approached refused to answer each of the 101 questions of EPQ and two of them declined to reveal personal information inquired in the second questionnaire, the researcher persisted in data collection process until the sample number reached 100.

Statistical Analysis: The respondent journalists' mean scores on three personality dimensions and the Lie scale were compared with those of the general population of Bangladesh. The mean scores of the normative groups (determined separately for male and female) and corresponding standard deviations were derived from Rahman (as stated before). The comparison between two mean scores was assessed applying t-test.

Results

If we assume population mean scores on Extraversion and Neuroticism dimensions as mid-points, and accordingly consider the higher and lower scores than those mean scores as Extraverted-Introverted and Neurotic-Emotionally Stable respectively, we can find different personality identification for the journalists of the sample: 48% of the sample of Bangladeshi journalists could be characterized as extraverted and the rest (52%) as introverted. 59%

of journalists in the sample could be characterized as emotionally stable and the rest (41%) as neurotic. Taking into consideration the orthogonality of the personality dimensions, 36% of the samples of Bangladeshi journalists were stable extraverts, 12% were neurotic extraverts, 23% were stable introverts and 29% were neurotic introverts.

Table 1: EPQ Scores of the male journalists compared to norms

P = Psychoticism, E = Extraversion, N = Neuroticism, L = Lie

	P		E		N		L	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Male journalists (n = 87)	2.24	1.79	9.92	3.47	7.79	4.78	11.08	3.32
Norms (n = 544)	3.25	2.81	10.34	3.32	8.51	4.20	11.7	14.07
Student's t	4.46*		1.05**		1.32**		1.58**	
	Significant		Not significant		Not significant		Not significant	
D.F.	163.13		112.64		108.28		131.10	

* p < 0.05, ** p = 0.05

Table 2: EPQ Scores of the female journalists compared to norms

P = Psychoticism, E = Extraversion, N = Neuroticism, L = Lie

	P		E		N		L	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Female journalists (n = 13)	1.54	1.39	10.69	2.72	9.46	5.26	11.92	2.95
Norms (n = 531)	2.69	2.60	9.98	3.56	9.52	4.51	12.54	3.83
Student's t	2.86*		0.92**		0.04**		0.74**	
	Significant		Not significant		Not significant		Not significant	
D.F.	12.27		13.02		12.43		13.01	

* p < 0.05, ** p = 0.05

Male and female respondent journalists' mean scores on three personality dimensions and lie scale were compared with those of the general people of Bangladesh. Bangladeshi male and female journalists were found to be much less psychoticistic than the whole population of the country. Out of 21 scoring items stipulated for psychoticism in the EPQ, the mean P-score for male journalists was 2.24, compared with 3.25 for the normative group. (Table 1) The difference was statistically significant at the <0.05 level. Also: the mean P-score of the female journalists was 1.54, compared with 2.69 for the normative group. (Table 2) The difference was significant at the <0.05 level. Thus it is apparent that Bangladeshi journalists are, as they are desired to be, less psychoticistic than the population at large.

Male journalists in the sample were surprisingly lower E-scorers than the normative group. Out of 16 Extraversion scoring items, their mean E-score was 9.92, compared with 10.34 for general population of Bangladesh. (Table 1) The difference was not however significant at the 0.05 level. Women journalists also were found to be more extraverted than their respective normative group (means of 10.69 compared with 9.98), but not significantly so. (Table 2).

Male journalists in the sample were found to be slightly less neurotic than the general people of Bangladesh (7.79 compared with 8.51, out of 22 N-scoring points), but again not significantly at the 0.05 level. (Table 1) The mean N-scores of female journalists and female people were almost equal (9.46 for newswomen and 9.52 for general women). (Table 2)

Male journalists of the sample were, true to the ideal, found to be somewhat more truth telling than the normative group. The mean L-score for male journalists was 11.08, compared with 11.71 for general population, where total L-scoring point is 19. (Table 1) However, the difference is not significant at the 0.05 level. The female journalists were similar. Their mean L-score (11.92) was not significantly different at the 0.05 level from the female population (12.54). (Table 2).

Discussion

This study is a responsive cross-cultural effort to Henningham's proposed new field of research. However, unlike Henningham's work, a reasonably detailed personality test was applied in this study. But, as a limitation, this research concentrated on journalists from the major two cities in Bangladesh only.

The study found that both male and female Bangladeshi journalists were on average less psychoticistic than their respective population, indicating that they are socially nicer. As psychoticism is characterized by undesirable behaviour tendencies (e.g. cruel, inhumane, hostile), this finding is well predictable about journalists as they one way or another work for and with the people. However, to a surprise, no significant difference was found on Extraversion between news workers and most people of Bangladesh. These findings might not have gone in line with the general view that noticeable higher extraversion would be a prime need in a journalist, specially a reporter. Such unpredictable finding might have been the result of engaging on the part of the news personnel in such a distinct occupation like journalism without predetermination or early age interest. Out of 100 respondents, 18 news workers revealed that they had not come to the occupation by their own choice. They had engaged in journalism as no more than the best job available. And this scenario might reflect a miserable aspect of socio-economic condition of Bangladesh. This South-Asian country, which got independence only three decades ago, suffers from serious population and unemployment problem. One has to face tough competition while getting into the job market. On failure, s/he would do nothing but chose a job which had never been thought before.

On the Question of neuroticism, both male and female journalists were found not to be significantly different from general people. This finding is quite desirable as a higher than average N-scorer individual might face difficulty to carry on in such a challenging occupation like journalism. A high N-scorer individual is thought to have a constant preoccupation of thing that might go wrong, and a strong emotional reaction of anxiety to those thoughts which interferes with his/her proper adjustment making him/her react in irrational, sometimes in rigid ways.

On the other hand, a journalist's day to day occupational affairs is mostly characterized by facing all the unusual and unpleasant phenomena in the mundane world. Moreover, strict deadline pressure, noisy newsroom, immediate public feedback are some of the special events that occur in a journalist's everyday life which could cause psychological discomfort. Hence, neuroticism is not expected to be in a journalist, as a high N-scorer might face immense psycho-physical pressure running his/her career.

Bangladeshi journalists also do not significantly differ from most people of the country on the Lie scale of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. This finding suggests that the respondents of this study did dissimulate as much as most people do. However, it might be expected that the L scores of the journalists should be much lower than average as they have a 'truth-telling image'.

Considering the view that journalists' psychological profiles might have an impact on their performance, further study on journalists' personality could be valuable. Looking at the relationship between various personality attributes and the ability to cope with some special aspects of journalistic job might be interesting.

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