

## **Fear, Fair, or Favor? How Senior Journalists Practice Self-Censorship, A Study of Top News Channels in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigates the reasons and factors behind self-censorship in Pakistani news channels. The study examines the reasons why and where journalists practice self-censorship due to fear where the censorship is the result of potential favors and where the editorial judgments for self-censorship are professional or fair in nature. The method of inquiry was qualitative. The Researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of thirty senior journalists from the top five news channels of Pakistan. The propaganda model and hierarchical influences model provides the theoretic guideline for the study. The results of the study show that job loss, life threats, family security are the fears factors behind self-censorship; personal belongings, afflictions, and financial benefits are the favors that lead the journalists to practice self-censorship. Findings also indicate that Journalists practice self-censorships in professional ways to avoid conflicts in the society.

***Keywords:*** *Pakistan, Professional Journalists, censorships, Self-Censorship, Fear, Favor, Fair.*

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## **Introduction**

Censorship has been used mostly for the negative purpose like observing community ethics, governor community attentiveness, and quiet resistance elements. Usually, administration censors scrutinize the press, periodicals, books, newscast transmissions, and flicks typically before proclamation to redact problematic material (Bennett & Naim, 2015).

The marvel of self-censorship has been a center of consideration both in news coverage and communication studies (Festenstein, 2018). The censorship on media at any level is damage the freedom of speech with is very important for the progress of any community and it is one of the basic rights of the human as well. Konvitz (2003) validates the freedom of the press and stated that unrestricted administration is always giving values to diverse opinion in the society and respect the freedom of expression of its people because they know that freedom of speech and expression is important for the growth and development of the society.

Self-censorship is not a worthy practice for the future of journalism. This is indistinguishable dangerous and affects negatively the trustworthiness of not only the journalism but the journalists also which can create a negative impact on society (Cook & Heilmann, 2013). To censor own work is like to cut the trees that you planted with your own hands, by doing this journalist are putting their occupation future in danger. Mostly self-censorship is the result of pressure and that comes from state establishments, commercial, community pressure groups, and illegitimate groups on the journalist and media groups also (Lee & Chan, 2008).

After a certain time, self-censorship becomes a habit or a normal practice for a working journalist. They now are very well aware which news they are allowed to broadcast which they need to filter out, for very obvious

reasons. The present study explored that what makes journalists in Pakistan limit themselves in expression in public affairs, and what sort of pressures lead them towards self-censorship. The present study examined why journalists do practice censorship? Do they fear something if yes then why and in which areas their fear leads them to practice self-censorship and what are the possible outcomes of fear that lead them to do self-censorship? The study explores the favor of benefits that journalists get and compromises their objectivity. What kinds of favor did they get to what extent do self-censorship results in getting any favor? The study further explores that from where they get mostly favors. The study further explores how professional fairness leads a journalist to do self-censorship, and in which areas journalists do self-censorship for professional fairness.

Mian (2005) explains that Pakistani media is not able to play the role of a fourth pillar of the estate because of censorship. The media content faces censorship at different levels, due to different pressures and influence manipulate the media content so it is not able to play the role of the fourth pillar. Pakistani media is controlled by different internal and external groups which may include, state, religion, PEMRA, sponsors, unseen powers, owner, pressure groups, and elite of society. Freedom House evaluated that Pakistani media is not a free media in their report ranked Pakistan at 150<sup>th</sup> rank in a total of 197 countries in freedom of media.

On the other hand, censorship is also related to the journalist which is called self-censor. Skjerdal (2010) points out, self-censorship is frequently ethically legitimized and impulses connected\_ whereas covering ethnic strife or national security issues. Journalist censors the information suppresses the knowledge and manipulates the public because of different factors of self-censorship. It's important to identify these factors which are involved in self-

editorial censorship. Because eliminating these factors is important for the strength, freedom, and legal reforms of media. The present study explores the reason for self-censorship and considers fear, favor, and professionalism as a factor of self-censorship. The study examines why journalists do practice censorship? Do they fear something if yes then why and in which areas their fear leads them to practice self-censorship and what are the possible outcomes of fear that lead them to do self-censorship? The study explores the favor of benefits that journalists get and compromises their objectivity. What kinds of favor did they get to what extent do self-censorship as a result of getting any favor? The study further explores that form where they get mostly favors. The study further explored how professional fairness leads a journalist to do self-censorship, and in which areas journalists do self-censorship for professional fairness.

### **Literature Review**

Self-censorship is a type of restriction that restricts freedom of speech and expression embarrassment that is not conceded by authorities but is enforced through a person that is accountable for creating a quantity of imaginative manifestation, to avert any apparent harmful response to that manifestation (Hayes et al., 2005). Self-censorship to explain as an exercise to control the information and expression due to different factors. Skjerdal (2010) points out, self-censorship is frequently ethically legitimized and impulses connected\_whereas covering ethnic strife or national security issues. On the other hand, Hunter (2009) explains that self-censorship was a reaction to the threatened and actual violence meted out to journalists and other outspoken personalities by representatives of the coup regime. Murat finds out that the fear of losing the jobs and life threats are the major causes which force countless working journalists to do self-censorship and not report or write the facts, which the knowledge and finds out.

Hayes et al (2005) conducted a study on the censorship of content, researchers used the mixed method to explore the concern problem, and researchers used a survey of public opinion about censorship and interviews with experts to explore the phenomena of censorship. The results of the study show that there are multiple ways of censorship, which censor the content and provide logic accordingly. Morris (2017) conducted a study to explore censorship in journalism. The researcher uses the interview method for data collection for the study. The results of the study show that censorship in journalism identified that all over the world journalism encompasses the features of self-censorship that varies in every process of the journalism from selecting a piece of news to editing and then the final publishing process at every set journalist do self-censorship to his content for very obvious reasons.

Correspondingly, Fuller (1997) conducted a study to examine the practices of self-censorship in news media and results showed that self-censorship inside news associations happen for different reasons and few of the legitimizations for utilizing it have included the welfares of graciousness, sensitivity, escaping of preventable damage, to avoid violence situation, or unfluctuating at the directive of the administration to guard underground procedures.

Cronau, (1995) conducted a study to examine the impact of self-censorship on freedom of media and results of the study show that self-censorship is extensively observed by way of a danger to freedom of media because it has been explained as the furthestmost destructive and treacherous procedure of censorship for working journalists.

On the other hand, Lee and Lin (2006) conducted a study to explore the pressure which leads a journalist to censor his content. The researcher uses the interviews method to collect the data the results of the study identified that

“political and economic” pressures are the most common reason that leads a journalist and a news organization towards self-censorship. Conversely, Cronau, (1995) conducted a study to examine the problem that causes by self-censorship.

Mohl (2015) conducted a study to examine the types of self-censorship in media and explained that there is a major type of self-censorship which is official self-censorship that seems to shelter the possessor from the contented.

Some studies investigated the intricate dynamics of self-censorship among Pakistani journalists, focusing on the factors of fair, fear, and favor. Fair, defined as the adherence to professional rules and ethics, reveals that self-censorship is often ethically justified, especially when covering sensitive topics like ethnic strife or national security (Skjerdal, 2010; Hunter, 2009; Foster, 2007). Fear, arising from threats and dangers, is identified as a significant catalyst for self-censorship, impacting journalists' job and life security. Some studies highlight instances of violence and threats faced by journalists globally, emphasizing the chilling effect fear has on media freedom (Aidan, 2015; Murat, 2016; UGSH, 2012). Job insecurity, delayed salaries, and legal issues contribute to a climate of fear among journalists, pushing them toward self-censorship (AJU, 2013; Nick, 2015; PFUJ, 2018).

Favor, encompassing support beyond the norm, is explored in the context of financial issues. Some studies reveal that reliance on government funding and advertisements creates a financial crisis, forcing journalists and media organizations to engage in self-censorship (Gannon, 2019; Adnan and Matiullah, 2005). Personal affiliations and belonging also play a role, impacting the objectivity of news reporting (Robertson, 2008; Skjerdal, 2015).

Previous literature discuss media freedom and censorship highlighting the challenges faced by Pakistani journalists, including external pressures,

economic constraints, and government interventions (Hanan et al., 2016; Siraj, 2009). The role of censorship, both external and self-imposed, is explored in different political contexts, emphasizing the constraints on freedom of speech and expression (Nadadur, 2007; Schimpfoss et al., 2020; Chaudary, 2018).

### **Methodology**

This study is exploratory research and an attempt to examine the self-censorship practice in Pakistani news channels. The subjective insights of working journalists shaped the fundamental data of the present study, henceforth that need a method of exploratory nature. So for the present study, the research pattern that follows is qualitative, and the researchers used semi-structured interviews through purposive sampling. The sample of the present study is the working journalist from the top five news channels of Pakistan, which includes Geo News, ARY News, Dunya News, Express News and Samaa. All the participants of the study gave consent to disclose their identities, so their names, designations and organizations have also been mentioned.

The research questions of the present study are the following:

RQ1: What are the fears that lead the journalist in Pakistan towards self-censorship?

RQ1.2: What type of content leads professionals to practice self-censorship due to fear?

RQ2: What are the favors that lead journalists in Pakistan towards self-censorship?

RQ2.1. what type of content professionals prefer to practice self-censorship to gain favors?

RQ3: Does professional fairness lead the journalists in Pakistan towards self-censorship?

RQ3.1. How many professionals are fair in practicing self-censorship?

**Table no 1: List of the sample of the study.**

Name	Organization	Designation	Working experience
Amin Hafeez	GEO News	Reporter	34 Years
Azam Malik	GEO News	Reporter	18 Years
Raees Ansari	GEO News	Bureau-Chief Lahore	29 Years
Zeeshan Baksh	GEO News	Reporter	18 Years
Usman Bhatti	GEO News	Reporter	17 Years
Mubashir Hashmi	GEO News	News Anchor	9 Years
Irza Khan	ARY News	Anchor	9 years
Nasir Bhatti	ARY News	Reporter	20 years
Hassan Hafiz	ARY News	Correspondent	9 Years
Rabia Noor	ARY News	Reporter	14 years
Nazeer Bhatti	ARY News	Senior Reporter	20 Years
Husnan Nafiy	ARY News	Senior Producer	15 Years
Awais Hameed	Express News	Controllor news	27 Years
Ayaz Khan	Express News	Senior Editor	29 Years
Ch. Lateef	Express News	Chief Editor	31 years
Hafiz Naveed	Express News	Shift in-charge	30 Years
Aslam Murad	Express News	Reporter	18 years
Mansoor Ali Khan	Express News	Anchor	28 Years
Taminaa	Samaa	Reporter	10 Years



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Shahid Hussain	Samaa	Reporter	20 Years
Arsha	Samaa	Producer	9 Years
Rayo Shahid	Samaa	Senior Producer	17 Years
Syed Ali Haider	Samaa	Anchor	12 Years
Hafiz Anwar	Samaa	Bureau-Chief	30 Years
		Lahore	
Marrium	Dunya News	News Anchor	9 Years
Zeshan			
Hasham Ali	Dunya News	Producer	10 Years
Hassan Raza	Dunya News	Reporter	19 Years
Zeeshan Malik	Dunya News	Reporter	18 Years
Uzair Malik	Dunya News	News Anchor	17 Years
Usman Gani	Dunya News	Senior Analyst	42 Years

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### **Themes and Data Analysis**

The present uses a thematic analysis approach to analyze the collected data. Mostly thematic analysis is used for qualitative data analysis. By using this method researcher developed themes from collected data and analyzed it to conclude. Thematic analysis is an inductive method of analysis in which data is divided into themes and then analysis, in the present study the researcher inductive approach under the themes of fair, fear and favor and extracted perspectives from data through open-ended and follow-up interview questions.

### **Results**

Findings reveal different patterns of self-censorship during practice of professional journalists. Pakistani news channels and there are various reasons for this censorship, there are multiple factors that influence the media content at various stages and lead a journalist to censor his/her content. The shows that

there are various reasons behind self-censorship in Pakistani news channels. According to Hafiz Naveed who is presently working as the shift in charge of Express news said that

“There are multiple reasons for self-censorship like Personal ideology, personal belonging, previous relations, and owner interest are some of the major reasons that leads are journalist to censor his content”

Furthermore, data reveals further factor and reasons for self-censorship in Pakistani news channels Awais Hameed who is working as controller news of Express news presently said Self-censorship is present in Pakistani news channels and he said:

“Self-censorship is present in Pakistani media but the motive behind that censorship is important, he further said that positive Self-censorship is important content that can create any sort of conflict and violence in the society or community needed to censor to avoid that conflict and violence and this censorship is fall in positive self-censorship, but to censor any content to get any benefits or favors form another party is of course not right and fall under the negative Self-censorship which needed to avoid. He further added that positive self-censorship is important for a responsible journalism”

### **Self-Censorship and Fear**

The collected data explore many reasons or factors that influence the content of a journalist and leads him towards Self-censorship, many respondents identify that the private ownership and the business community owns the media channels have created a major influence on the media content any this which is not in the favor of owners interest a journalist cannot broadcast it and he needed to self-censor his content otherwise have to bear the consequences. As Shahid Hussain who is working as a reporter in Samaa TV said:

“Any news which is not in the favor of the owners’ interest or anything against any advertisers you cannot report that or even you report it will definitely get censor and not broadcast. Therefore, presently owners and advertisers interest are become more important and leads a journalist to self-censor his content.”

The data gathered for the present study identified that there are different short of fears that lead a working journalist to do self-censorship fears like job loss, life threats, security issues for family and friends, defamation, and others. As Rayo Shahid who is presently working in Samaa TV said:

“While working in media presently you have to take care of many things when it comes to cover or report any news. That news is for sure not against the interest of the owner and advertiser, if do so then be ready for the consequences that can range from show cause to firing letter”

Similarly, Husnan Nafiy who is working in ARY News presently said “Pakistan is not a very safe country for journalist especially investigate journalist, if you are filing an investigative report against any big mafia you have to think about it much time because this report can cause your life, or maybe the life of any of your family member so most of the time journalist because of life risk self-censor his content which is against the mafias”.

Correspondingly, Nazeer Bhatti who is presently working in ARY News said:

While covering the protest of any community or party you have to be very careful because the opinion against that community or party will build anger in the member of that community and party and they can harm you, and as there are safety concerns are already existing for the journalist, so journalist have to use self-censorship while covering such issues.”

Hassan Hafiz, employed at ARY News, mentioned that when covering stories involving mafias or influential individuals, they employ a strategy of

not pressuring the owner for termination. Instead, they resort to defamation tactics, damaging the journalist's credibility. The consequence is not only job loss but also jeopardizes future opportunities, as working with a journalist who has lost credibility becomes undesirable. This stands out as a significant factor compelling journalists to practice self-censorship.

Aslam Murad, associated with Express-News, pointed out that news capable of harming the interests of the owner, advertiser, or channel's policy guidelines cannot be reported, regardless of its public and societal relevance. Reporting such news would risk job loss, along with visible threats of legal actions. Consequently, journalists find themselves compelled to self-censor their content in order to navigate these challenges.

### **Self-Censorship and Favors**

Data further explain some further factors which lead a working journalist to do self-censorship, the data identified there are multiple reasons of personal benefits favor and personal belonging of the journalists that leads a journalist to do self-censorship. Sayed Ali Haider who is presently working at Samaa TV said:

“Sometimes that belonging to the channel for which you are working enforce to censor or alter the facts of the news which are against their belonging party person, or organizations. But sometimes the personal belonging or affliction of the journalist himself made him do self-censorship he alters the facts in the favor of his affliction or liking towards any party person or organizations that is for sure against the ethics of journalism but unfortunately, this is a practice”

Similarly, Usman Bhatti who is presently working in Dunya News said:

“To change the narrative of the journalist different party person, or organizations do give favor to the journalist to write or report in their favor so a positive public narrative is start building for them. These favors include

invitations to luxury events, press trips, and other benefits, but yes these are become very less in the present era of the PTI government, in past, there are multiple examples of such trips and luxury events”

Similarly, Zeeshan Bashkaha who is presently working with Dunya News said:

“To build certain narrative parties, individuals, or organizations do give certain favors to a journalist so they will write or report their point of view or the opinion in their favor these favors are in different forms sometimes in the form of a return favor or gift or even cash, but this is also a reality that no on the paper fact of such activities is available, but under the tables, such activities are happening everyone knows this.”

Correspondingly, Rais Ansari who is presently working in GEO News said regarding the favors which journalists get and do self-censorship he said: Everyone has heard these words that this journalist is on the payroll of a certain person or party or a certain television channel is in the favor of a certain party. But you cannot find any shot of on-paper facts regarding these words. But you have heard these words on an almost daily basis and their work is also echoing that..... again no paper facts are available. So these underground activities are there which are affecting the objectivity of a journalist and leads him to do self-censorship.

Likewise, Hafiz Naveed who is presently working in Express-News explains the favors phenomena in self-censorship he said:

You can see the ad rate difference in different channels and the distribution of government advertisements differently among different news channels. The reason behind this is how much you influence the content according to their will the ad rate and frequency will increase. So while influencing the content

ensorship and self-censorship works at their peak.....and you will have to investigate the objective in the content then.

Similarly, Arsha who is working in Samaa TV said:

The objectivity of the news is damage through different pressures and tactics, in which the financial support plays an important role.....to run a channel you need finances and government advertisements play an important role in them. They provide more advertisements and on the high rate to those channels which are in the support of them, and the low rate and few are provided to the channel which is not in support of the government. Therefore, the channel faces the financial issues and alter his views to get government advertisements to avoid the financial crisis.

Zeeshan Baksh who is working in GEO News said:

Presently our media organizations are own by businessmen and they share a mutual interest with other businessmen and politicians. Therefore, no news can go on-air which can damage the mutual interest of these businessmen and politicians. They take care of each other interest and give favors to them, which is damaging the objectivity of the news.

Azam Malik who is working in GEO News said:

“In the past journalist receives different trips luxury events invites and personal favors to alter the fact from different powerful individuals or organizations. But presently this practice is change, one main reason for cutting this trips and luxury is that powerful individuals or organizations have made good terms with the media owners so now they direct approach them and their work is done the journalist is out from this loop now”.

Meanwhile, a financial crisis, placing a significant burden on working journalists. They contend with salary issues and reductions, turning job stability and income into substantial challenges for journalists. The prevailing

financial difficulties lead journalists to face offers of bribes or favors, compelling them to compromise factual accuracy through self-censorship. Consequently, amidst the existing financial crisis, journalists are increasingly inclined to accept such inducements and manipulate the information.

Awais Hameed, associated with Express-News, highlighted a broader issue wherein journalists receive payments from sources other than their regular employers to influence public opinion. This practice is particularly prevalent in supporting specific politicians or political parties, with journalists producing paid content in favor of and endorsing particular individuals or political groups.

### **Self-Censorship and Fair**

The gathered data explain professional fairness and self-censorship the data explains that some time to censor the media the professional requirement, data further explain that any news or information that can cause or create violence or conflict among the society need to be altered to avoid the conflict and violence in the society. Rabia Noor who is presently working in ARY news said:

“While covering a public gathering or protest it needed to be very careful. You need to check while reporting such events that any word or fact does not go on air which can cause conflict among communities or individuals. So such thing you needed to alter this is your professional responsibility that not to report such a thing which can cause conflicts. So in such a situation self-censorship happened but of course in a good manner”.

Likewise, Mansoor Ali Khan who is presently working in express news said regarding professional fairness and self-censorship:

“Content that is against the national policy or national security of the country is needed to alter furthermore, the content or news which is against the national

prestige institutions is needed to alter. In such a situation self-censorship happened positively and the journalist does it to fulfill his professional responsibility”

Marriam Zeeshan who is working in Dunya news said:

“Laws do restrict reporting on ethnic or religious issues, national security, or other sensitive topics, to avoid any sort of disturbance and conflicts in society. But this also a personal responsibility of journalist while covering any ethnic or religious, on national security issues to avoid confits, this is the professional responsibility of the journalist”

Usman Gani who is working in Dunya News said:

“While covering issues like ethnicity, religion, national security, national sovereignty, social taboos or other sensitive topics, the journalist has to be very careful that his coverage does not create any damage or conflict among the society. This carefulness is the professional responsibility of a journalist .....but the sensible journalist obeys this otherwise they on air such content to get a rating and think the notice is the end of this....but of course rating is important. Examples of the ban and temporary off-air is also there.”

Meanwhile, Zeeshan Malik, associated with Dunya News, emphasized the importance of adhering to PEMRA's rules and regulations as a professional responsibility for journalists. These guidelines are crafted to facilitate responsible journalism, preventing journalists from causing harm or inciting violence in society. However, there is a notable lack of compliance with PEMRA's regulations, even though the regulatory body became active in response to feedback from effective sectors.

Mubashir Hashmi, employed at GEO News, highlighted the role of social norms in shaping coverage approaches, especially regarding sensitive issues such as social conflicts, rape, physical or sexual abuses, and social



taboos. It is both a social and professional responsibility to cover such topics while respecting societal norms and values. Professional fairness dictates avoiding coverage of issues that may undermine these established norms and values.

Amin Hafeez, a part of Geo News, stressed that professional fairness requires journalists to adhere to the rules and ethics of journalism. These guidelines are formulated to prevent societal conflicts, especially when covering social, religious, or national security issues. Journalists are expected to engage in self-censorship to avoid content that could lead to conflicts.

Hassan Raza, associated with Dunya News, pointed out the existence of rules governing the coverage of ethnic, religious, or national security issues. The professional responsibility of journalists is to follow these rules, but there is a distinction between the rules of dictatorship and democracy in this regard.

Hafiz Anwar, working at Samaa TV, acknowledged that certain laws impose restrictions on reporting sensitive issues related to ethnicity, religion, national security, and more. Authorities sometimes limit media coverage in the name of national security. Despite these restrictions, a journalist's professional responsibility is to consider social norms while covering sensitive issues and engage in self-censorship to prevent conflicts in society.

## **Discussion**

Based on the results, it can be debated that through censorship, one can control or conquer those expressions which can threaten the safety and damage the law of any state, organization, or institute. The results of the present study show that journalist in Pakistan is not a very safe country for the journalists. Journalism is a challenging field in Pakistan because of social structure, religious extremism, terrorism, pressure groups, and ownership interest which make this field more difficult and force the journalist to do self-censorship. But

there is some other factor which influences the news in the cooperative sector like the financial interest of the owner, personal affiliations, demand of sponsors and advertisement policy effect news objectivity in media.

The results of the present study explore that the fears which leads a working journalist to do self-censorship are the fear of losing the job as most respondents said that in private media any news which is against the interest of owner and advertisers you cannot report or broadcast it, if do so you have to be ready for the consequences, that from show-cause notices to losing the job. Most of the media owners are businessmen in Pakistan. They use the media as a tool to flourish their businesses and that's why every channel has their different policy according to personal benefits. Designing the news according to Organization and owner's interest is the primary responsibility of journalists and according to the participant of the study that whenever they resist the policy they always lose their job. These findings are aligned with Aidan (2015) who identify that fear is a key reason for self-censorship in working journalist.

It has been observed that censorship happens once journalists and media organizations are not administered by editorial apprehensions, but by fear only. And they censorship content because of fear of different pressure groups and elites. The results further explain that life threats are also one fall in fears that force a journalist to do self-censorship. The life of a journalist is always in danger that way it becomes a theme of argument, especially in the developing countries. According to the respondents, there is a very close relationship between fear and self-censorship. There is the different factor of fear which influence the reporter and news authenticity. To talk about religion is a big challenge in Pakistan same as reporting on social taboos may cause harmful for the journalist. National security is another sensitive topic in this society and journalists take dictation to avoid unhealthy events.

Furthermore, the results of the study explain that there are always some rules which directly or indirectly stop journalist to publish the news. These rules may be related to channel policy, owner direction on certain issues, or dictation from national security agencies on a specific story. Every news channel has an editorial policy according to their interest and agenda, they give the story according to policy.

Most of the time owners of media houses are businessmen in Pakistan and have ties with the government or politicians. The owner uses the media as a tool to flourish their businesses and the government uses the media to achieve certain goals. That's why no one denies the influence of the owner and government. The findings also imply that the government plays important role in censorship. It is common practice that the government pressurizes the channels by using PEMRA and create the distribution issues and set the channel in last numbers. The result shows that yes there are different stories about losing a job but they didn't experience it personally because now they are mature enough and avoid crossed the limits defined by state and organization, but there is always the fear of losing a job is present in mind

Self-censorship is a common behavior in media, one cannot be surviving without censoring yourself. There is some social, economic and political issue which bound the journalist to follow the self-censorship, this field has become more challenging after the birth of private media, and media is now cooperative business which means to earn profit directly or indirectly. Ownership, marketing, and sponsors influence the news and bound the journalist to follow the rule of self-censorship.

The results of the study also explore that, there are different short of favors that lead a journalist to do self-censorship. Media is the fourth pillar of state but the condition of freedom of speech is not favorable in Pakistan.

According to the participant in the interview, the Government plays an important role in self-censorship. Owner of media houses has business ties with politicians and mutual interest so the government use pressure to censor the news. Most of the time channels, directly and indirectly, define their policy of content and where the journalist already knows this news is not being aired ‘and self-censored.

Another element of favor that force the journalist to follow the self-censor is explored in the study. Journalists avail different kinds of favors in their professional and personal life. Result of the interview shows that some journalist receives an invitation of luxury events, press trips and another benefit that would weaken their publications objectivity. Journalists receive a bribe in the form of gifts and the gift may be in the form of property. Only favorite journalist enjoys foreign trips with the prime minister and narrates the event according to government dictation. This trend was very common in the previous government as compared to the recent tenure of PTI. Stakeholders use the media for their interest and media design their editorial policy according to the benefits and do cooperate. Government grants with more ads and good rates when the channel has favorable editorial policy according to the demand.

The results of the present study show that the culture of bribes, gifts, and financial favor is coming down because every owner has business ties with politicians and government so they mutually give a favor on a large scale that’s why the role of the journalist is limited nowadays. But they agreed that journalists sometimes paid by some other source to influence what they write. The results of the study further explore that sometime journalist has personal affliction with a certain party, personality, and ideology that’s why they do self-censorship and manipulate the news. On the other hand, journalists do self-

self-censorship to come in good books of the boss, narrate the story according to the boss's will and get promotions. So favor is one of the major reason behind self-censorship

Sometimes journalists are paid by hidden sources and self-censor the content without any pressure they mostly due to gain some personal benefits. Program anchor practices this type of activity and twists the news according to will. On the other hand, Personal belonging, likeness, and ideology lead toward self-censorship behavior and journalist conditionally or unconditionally play up and play down the story.

Therefore, the results of the present study show that favor to journalists and media owners is the reason to do self-censorship. The results show that the favor includes financial favor, retune favor gift and in the form of cash is always there which leads the journalist to do self-censor. So the second research question concludes on these favors that lead the journalist to do self-censorship.

The results under third theme of the study is the fair that can explain as professional fairness, which may restrict the journalist to hold some news and do self-censorship. The results show that it includes professional ethics, norm, the culture of society, law and ordinance structure, social responsibility, and religious institutions. Any news or information that can damage the social norms, national security, create social conflicts or violence, contain social taboos, religious conflicts, or and short of conflicts and harm to the peace and sovereignty of the nation has to censor. The findings are also aligned with Skjerdal (2010) who indicated that self-censorship is often morally legitimized and instincts associated\_whereas covering ethnic strife or national security issues.

Therefore, the results conclude the third research question of the study that professional fairness damage the journalist to do self-censorship on the content that can damage the social norms, national security, create social conflicts or violence, contain social taboos, religious conflicts or and short of conflicts and harm to the peace and sovereignty to the nation.

## **Conclusion**

The use of self-censorship in contemporary media is acknowledged, and its impact depends on how journalists employ it—either positively or negatively. Positive self-censorship involves withholding content that may incite conflict, harm, or violence, aligning with ethical responsibilities. Journalists need awareness to discern when self-censorship is justified. Conversely, negative self-censorship occurs when personal benefits or affiliations influence content, requiring vigilance to prevent compromising journalistic integrity. Various factors contribute to self-censorship, driven by fears related to societal challenges, religious extremism, terrorism, pressure groups, and ownership interests in Pakistan's journalism. Additionally, financial interests of media owners, personal affiliations, sponsorship demands, and advertisement policies can affect news objectivity. Private media often refrains from reporting against owners' or advertisers' interests, leading to consequences like job loss for journalists who resist such policies. Government intervention is influential in self-censorship, as media owners, tied to politicians, and may face pressure to control news content. Journalists receiving favors, such as invitations to events and gifts, may compromise objectivity. The study notes a positive shift as the present government curtails such practices, enhancing news objectivity. Professional fairness dictates self-censorship in matters that could disrupt social norms, national security, create conflicts, involve taboos, or threaten peace and sovereignty.

In conclusion, understanding the nuanced application of self-censorship is crucial for journalists. Positive self-censorship aligns with ethical responsibilities, while vigilance is required to prevent negative self-censorship driven by personal interests. The influence of factors such as ownership interests, government pressure, and favors necessitates a mindful approach to maintain journalistic integrity and enhance the overall quality of media.

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