

# **Information System, Media And Communication And The Decision Making: An Analysis Of The Impact Of Self-Censorship On Objective Journalism In Pakistan**

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## **Abstract**

Information system and the communication process through various means remain to topmost difficult and complicated mechanism in dissemination various decisions. Free flow of media content as a sacred trust enshrining local moralities and universal truth is the essence of press freedom which employs the basic prospects of press to play its part in nation building process. Censorship in any form like pre-censorship, undeclared censorship or self-censorship is a murderous interference leading to demolish the dome of press freedom that deprives citizens, society and the state of the benefits of a free press. The ground realities regarding censorship are embodied in the field and direct consultation with working journalists for being a component part of the play is the only way to reach a conclusion acceptable for generalization. For the purpose, this empirical study launches survey to explore the media landscape of Pakistan and investigate working journalists for digging out the existence, intensity and impacts of self-censorship on professional objectivity of media content. For more in-depth exploration of indicators, this study engages senior journalists in face-to face interviews throughout Pakistan. The findings prove the hypothesis that working journalists exercise self-censorship in Pakistan and also establish the fact that such practices deteriorate the media objectivity.

**Keywords:** Self-censorship, Pakistan's media landscape, media professionalism, professional objectivity

## Introduction

Information system, communication and the decision-making process has been the most difficult and complicated process. The nexus of Press and censorship is as old as the press in the form of mass medium of communication. Media scholars and researchers mark it from the advent of the twentieth century when the freedom of expression was recognized as a fundamental human right ratified by the United Nation through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 2019) where article 19 ratifies the freedom of the press. Similarly, article 19 and 19A of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan guarantees the free flow of communication (Senate of Pakistan 2019), but at the same time, the free flow is confined in legal frames in most of the countries and in the regional instruments like the Banjul Charter (APHCR 2019) and European Convention on Human Rights (HRNet 1950).

Besides these legal censors in the name of self-defined national and regional interests, the darkest aspect of confining tactics is the unofficial and bare constraints on the free flow of information that is in exercise on media content across the world including Pakistan (Yusuf and Schoemaker 2013). Censorship in itself is the incarcerating tool aimed to subjugate the media content (Williams 1986) but self-censorship is the most drastic feature because it indicates the fear of known and undeclared threats and also reflects the prevailing terror in the media environment<sup>1</sup>, which this study attempts to locate and generalize for better understanding in Pakistan's media context. The more important dimension of self-censorship is that it makes its way when journalists get despair of the rule of law and desperation becomes the outcome of a low level of law-and-order situation.

It is also a generally held view that the distrust in judicial inquiries, the lack of threats redresses mechanism, low tolerance for press's criticism, no job security, no proper training, no institutional back support, no insurance, low salaries, uncontrollable state and non-state actor's intervention, political affiliations of media owners and journalists and other are the causes that compel working journalists to employ self-censorship as a protective shield for their lives and livelihoods. The intensity of the set of facts lies in its impacts on the very objectivity of the media content. If the content is biased it would be more menacing in its consequences. The study endeavors to locate the impacts of practicing self-censorship in the media environment of the country.

The situation with such degree of censorship needs to explore the media landscape by actively engaging the working journalists in two stream investigation structure which this research tries in modus operandi of baseline survey and face-to-face interviews with the component part of the play on the media theatre of Pakistan.

## Literature review

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<sup>1</sup> Kahn W. (2018, April 25). Personal Communication [Personal interview] in Karachi Press Club.

Censorship and self-censorship are the hot issues of the post-modern era in the contexture of global information revolution and a lot of literature and intellectual writings, report, surveys and news stories evaluate these subjects deeply but very little academic research and scientific study in the context of Pakistan is so long found. The current study will be probably a precious addition on the motif of self-censorship and its impacts on the professional objectivity of journalism. Self-censorship is proved to be global. Journalists around the world are practicing self-censorship as a protective cover and causes are rooted in political, cultural, social, and economic pressure from both state and non-state actors (Yesil 2014).

On the ground of the mechanism of self-censorship, Cook and Conrad Heilmann (2010) in their working paper establish that the process of self-censorship is involved in the suppression of an individual's attitude towards the content, so which is very harmful in its all shapes and engineering (Cook and Heilmann 2010). In respect to the financial ties of self-censorship in its nature is a public service but due to financial and other constraints it is constantly under pressure for censoring and as a result, reflects a lack of neutrality and objectivity (Witschge and Nygren 2015).

The financial aspect of self-censorship was also depicted by a study by Fridh and Wingren of Palestinian media. They found that the major cause of self-censorship practices is the low-income dilemma of the journalists and the press in terms of salaries and prescriptions which compel journalists to compromise professionalism (Fridh and Wingren 2015). Political pressure is located by Lee (2007) in his study on self-censorship in Hong Kong, he asserts that self-censorship is a defense mechanism against the politically based pressure on the press, and sometimes that pressure leads to violence against professional objectivity and the press's services as a watchdog (Lee 2007).

A very interesting dimension of self-censorship has been found while studying self-censorship in the Chinese Community. Self-censorship is linked with the collectivism of society and that is a defense shield to avoid the adverse social reaction (Pang 2008). A relatively remarkable impact of self-censorship was located by Yuwei Sun. He discovers that self-censorship affects the circulation of newspapers because readers lose their confidence due to a lack of objectivity and neutrality in the content (Sun 2014). Chiara Landi locates self-censorship as a cover against political reaction. He finds that self-censorship as a shield, is in practice all around the world but where there is lesser tolerance in society it works more (Landi 2014). It is imperative now to locate the intensity of self-censorship and establish its impacts on media content in Pakistan's context which this study attempts.

### **Objectives and significance of the study**

This study is aimed at exploring the existence, intensity, and impacts of self-censorship in the Pakistani media context. It is important to note that ground reality and scientific analysis is possible only if the component parts of the play are involved in the investigation. The current research work engages working journalists in a survey with a highly centralized questionnaire constructed under the Likert scale which is the best choice for quantitative survey research that provides facilitated options and an easily understandable questioning paradigm in "full, partial,

no, or have no idea” formation. The perceptions of working journalists regarding the existence, intensity, and impacts of self-censorship prove as their confession in fair play for being an active part of the game.

Significance of the study is embodied in its construction, findings and conclusion that provide with scientific results able to be generalized for the field under study in the context of the Pakistani media environment. The study leads to locating the magnitude and impacts of the recognized professional objectivity of journalism which will facilitate all the intended measures in press freedom in the country.

### **Research Methodology**

This research employs the qualitative research method with a nonrandom mechanism for clustering the population while random technique under Snowball choice within the clusters.

The study patronages the geographical area of Pakistan into five clusters i.e. Sindh, Baluchistan, Islamabad and Rawalpindi, KPK, and Punjab. Forty working journalists from each cluster are engaged to respond to the closed-ended questions constructed under Liker’s Scale with an easy approach and facilitation to reply in full, partial, no, or have no idea pattern.

More in this regard, the study arranges face-to-face interviews with twenty senior journalists, four from each cluster for the purpose of further authenticating the results.

This study also deploys statistical representation by percentage to make the results more understandable.

### **Hypothesis**

This research comes with two hypotheses to systematically examine the universe of the study as below.

**H1:** Journalists in Pakistan, exercise self-censorship

**H2:** Self-censorship affects professional objectivity

### **Self-censorship in the media environment of Pakistan and its impacts on professional objectivity: journalists’ perspectives**

Most of the senior journalists in Pakistan perceive that working journalists employ self-censorship in their journalistic works and such practices affect professional objectivity. Shakeel Anjum<sup>2</sup> opines that journalists in Pakistan are working in general conditions of threats and despair that compel them to take self-defense measures like self-censorship.

Nawaz Tahir<sup>3</sup> claims that journalists are confined due to their weak financial position, low salaries, and no job security which make them more impotent to face adverse reactions against

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<sup>2</sup> Anjum S. (2018, May 05). Personal Communication [Personal interview] in National Press Club, Islamabad.

<sup>3</sup> Tahir N. (2018, May 09). Personal Communication [Personal interview] in Lahore Press Club.

the pressure from both the outside and from the inside of media organizations and this state of affairs push them to seek shelter behind the curtain of self-censorship.

Saeed Khawar<sup>4</sup> declares that the press in Pakistan has never enjoyed the freedom and no one could dare to cross the visible or invisible barricades imposed by the factions in power. Journalists are living and can only live behind the protective cover of self-censorship and that is why the press in Pakistan exists even today.

Anwar Shah<sup>5</sup> denotes that rivalries in journalist's community and among journalists which results in conspiracies compel journalists to censor their professional jobs.

Ayub Tareen<sup>6</sup> indicates that most of the journalists in Pakistan are not professional and the basic reason is their vulnerability to threats from state and non-state actors and as a result the media content is censored and that is labeled as biased. There are only two ways to be a journalist, the one is to carry the biased and partisan line and the second is to employ self-censorship to content and secure your job, life and property.

Fida Khattak<sup>7</sup> demonstrates that the press and journalists are facing multidimensional threats. State institutions, political and other pressure groups sustain pressure on journalists on one hand and the owners of media organizations threaten them for corporate interests on the other such practices force journalists to be careful to handle the matter and self-censorship is the sole shielding cover in such circumstances but it is done on the expenses of professional objectivity. Senior Journalists around Pakistan have common perceptions on the existence of self-censorship in the media environment of the country and its impacts on the objectivity of professional traits. But most of them proclaim that self-censorship is mesmerizing due to the hovering threats in the media landscape of the country although it is a killer for the basic prospect of media professionalism.

### Research findings and discussion

Base-line survey with a centralized questionnaire constructed under Likert's scale provides with the following results presented in statistical schemes as below for better understanding.

#### The presence of self-censorship in the media the environment of Pakistan

The following table summarizes the responses of sampled journalists about the existence of self-censorship in the media environment of Pakistan while the figure illustrates the results when working journalists were asked whether journalists exercise self-censorship regarding their professional jobs.

Level of self-censorship in media in Pakistan	Frequency
Journalists fully exercise self-censorship	36
Journalists partially exercise self-censorship	116

<sup>4</sup> Khawar S. (2018, April 18). Personal Communication [Personal interview] in 92News Office, Karachi

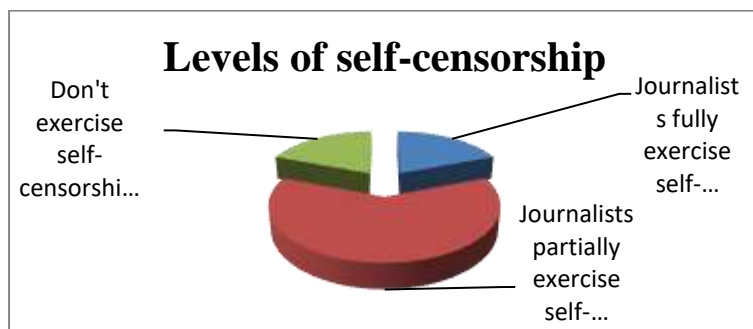
<sup>5</sup> Shah A. (2018, May 15). Personal Communication [Personal Interview] at Quetta Press Club, Quetta.

<sup>6</sup> Tareen A. (2018, May 15). Personal Communication [Personal Interview] at Quetta Press Club, Quetta.

<sup>7</sup> Khattak F. (2018, May 07). Personal Communication [Personal Interview] at Neo TV office, Peshawar.

journalists don't exercise self-censorship	36
Have no idea	17
Total	205

**Table No1.**



**Figure no1**

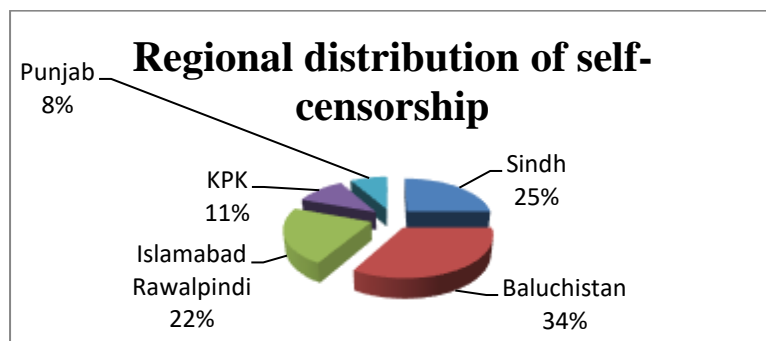
**Interpretation:** The above results reveal that majority (62%) of the journalists exercise self-censorship partially while the ratio of journalists who fully exercise self-censorship was 19% only. However, (19%) of journalists did not exercise self-censor. The results also reveal a significant number of journalists i.e., 82%, experienced the existence of self-censorship in the media theatre. The journalists also noted that this situation presented a biased portrait of media objectivity.

### Regional Distribution of self-censorship

Table no 2, presents the frequency distribution of self-censorship in different regions of the state while the figure portrays the percentage of the presence of self-censorship in all the five clusters under study.

Clusters	Full	Partial	No	Have no Idea	Total
Sindh	9	26	3	3	41
Baluchistan	12	18	7	4	41
Islamabad Rawalpindi	8	19	10	4	41
KPK	4	23	9	5	41
Punjab	3	30	7	1	41
Total	36	116	36	17	205

**Table No2.**



**Figure no2**

**Interpretation:** The table no2 and figure no2 indicate that Baluchistan tops the rest at 34% followed by Sindh at 25%, Islamabad and Rawalpindi at 22%, KPK at 11%, and at 8% by Punjab regarding the exercise of self-censorship in media.

Findings denote that journalists in Baluchistan are more vulnerable to pressure exerted by various forces inside society which helped them to polish their professional work in accordance with their position to avoid the possible dire consequences.

It is understandable because of the presence exerted by Baloch separatists on journalists in the province, the Linguistic crisis, and the Taliban factors that inevitably nurture the media rivalries and that induce journalists to censor the media content.

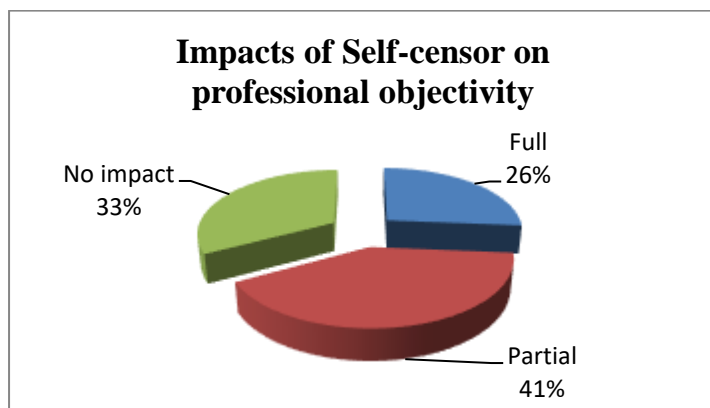
It was also found that journalists faced different situations in Sindh province and the capital of the country. As compared to other geographical study areas of the research, different segments as political parties, land mafias, street criminals, and ethnical and regional groups in Islamabad and Sindh province were found to be more involved in the war for more space and extensive coverage. The consequences of this sort of pressure also resulted in the exercise of self-censoring for media content.

### **The impacts of self-censorship on professional objectivity**

The following table no3 summarizes the perceptions of journalists on the subject of the impacts of self-censorship on the objectivity of media content while the figure illustrates the responses when journalists were asked whether self-censorship fully, partly or in no way affect professional objectivity.

Does Self-censorship affect objectivity?	Frequency
Fully	40
Partially	62
Have no impact	50
Total	152

**Table no3**



**Figure no3.**

**Interpretation:** Statistics show that self-censorship highly affected objectivity in media content. The findings reveal that 41% of the total respondents declared partial impacts while 26% perceived the various forces had full impact on media objectivity. Among them, 33% of the total proclaimed no impact of self-censorship on their professional work.

Findings affirm the impacts at 67% which is alarming as there is no space for indentation in media content. The biased media is more drastic in all its dimensions and that the findings urge significant redresses of the circumstances perceived by working journalists in Pakistan.

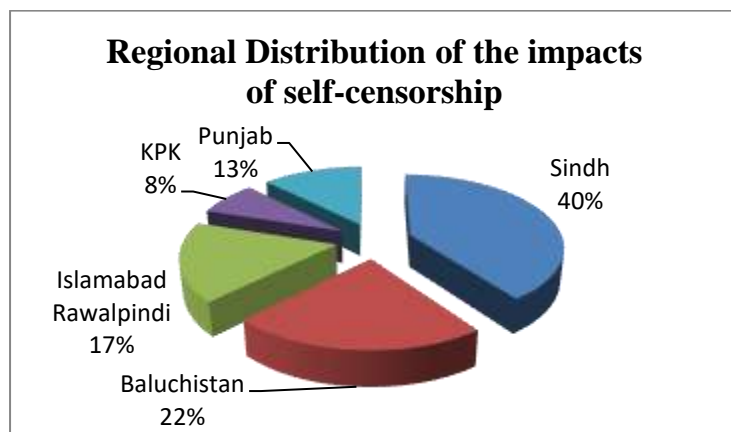
#### **Geographical distribution of the impacts of self-censorship on media content**

The following table places the geographical intensity of the impacts of self-censorship as perceived by sample journalists while the figure shows the percentage distribution of full impacts on media content in different regions of the state.

Clusters	Frequency
Sindh	16
Baluchistan	9
Islamabad Rawalpindi	7
KPK	3
Punjab	5
Total	40

**Table no4**





**Figure no4**

**Interpretation:** The above Table no.04 and figure no.04 reveal that regarding the impacts of self-censorship, Sindh was on the top with (40%) followed by Baluchistan at 22%, Islamabad and Rawalpindi at 17%, Punjab at 13% and KPK percentage were 08.

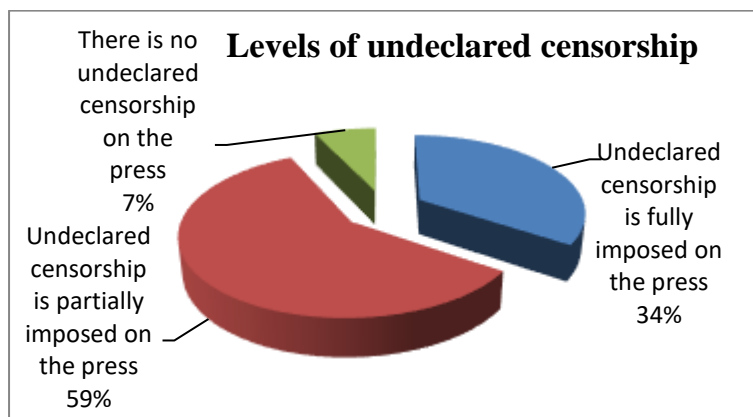
Findings stipulate that the province of Sindh was the region where self-censorship had more impacts on objectivity which indicated the higher vulnerability of journalists to threats in this part of the state.

**The presence of un-declared censorship in media environment of Pakistan**

The following table summarizes perceptions of sampled journalists regarding the existence of un-declared censorship in the media environment of Pakistan while figure illustrates the percentage of responses when journalists were asked whether undeclared censorship is fully, partially or not in exercise in the country.

Level of undeclared censorship on the press	Frequency
Undeclared censorship is fully imposed on the press	63
Undeclared censorship is partially imposed on the press	107
There is no undeclared censorship on the press	13
Have no idea	22
Total	205

**Table no5.**



**Figure no5.**

**Interpretation:** The data revealed that un-declared censorship was mostly in exercise in the Pakistani media environment. Fifty nine percent of journalists affirmed partial, and 34% confirmed the full exercise of undeclared censorship over their work whereas only seven percent of journalists stated that there was no undeclared censorship was imposed on the press.

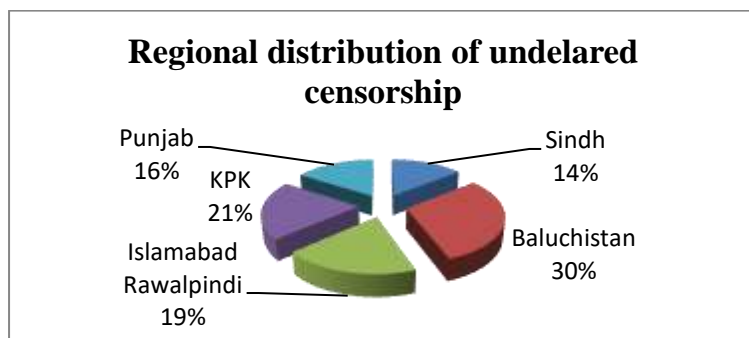
Findings also demonstrate that undeclared censorship highly infiltrated in the media environment and the situations were troubling regarding the freedom of press because the undeclared censorship was the most dangerous condition in comparison with other forms of censorship like the pre-censorship, voluntary or involuntary censorship and good or bad censorship.

### Regional presence of un-declared censorship

The following table no6 presents the full existence of undeclared in different regions of Pakistan while the figure no6 illustrates the percentage distribution of full undeclared censorship in the all five clusters under study.

Clusters	Frequency
Sindh	9
Baluchistan	19
Islamabad Rawalpindi	12
KPK	13
Punjab	10
Total	63

**Table no6.**



**Figure no6.**

**Interpretation:** The above table no6 and figure no6 show that Baluchistan was on the top of the list with 30% of respondents stated that undeclared censorship was imposed on the press in the province followed by the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) at 21%, the ratio in Islamabad and Rawalpindi was found at 19%, Punjab at 16% and the lowest percentage was in Sindh with 14%.

Findings visualize that undeclared censorship was mostly exercised in Baluchistan and KP provinces. The reason of such high ratio in these two provinces can be linked with the socio-political makeup in the regions. But the presence of undeclared censorship in all the clusters with little difference indicated that it was in its swing in the whole media environment of Pakistan.

### Conclusion and recommendations

The study explored the media environment of Pakistan for self-censorship and its impacts on professional objectivity. The findings prove the hypothesis that working journalists exercise self-censorship in Pakistan and also establish the fact that such practices deteriorate the media objectivity and its content which is the basic prospect of the profession.

The study also examined the undeclared censorship imposed on the press in Pakistan and found that that was highly in exercise in the media environment of the state.

The important issue was that journalists exercised self-censorship as a shield to protect themselves from the certain adverse reaction on media content from both state and non-state actors due to low level of tolerance for press's criticism in the society and that is due to unrealistic and illogical module of political communication.

The study also discovered that journalists, all over the country, undertook self-censorship which portrayed a very degrading situation of press freedom and validated the threatening scenario prevailed in the media environment of Pakistan.

The conclusion urges the government and concern institutions to properly redress the deteriorated condition of press freedom that compels journalists to exercise self-censorship as a protective shield through legal framework and dialogue mechanism among the stakeholders. Only then, journalists will perform their duty professionally and the state and society will get the fruit of a free press in the form of real democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people.

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