

## Journal of Peace, Development and Communication



Volume 05, Issue 1, January-March 2021  
 pISSN: 2663-7898, eISSN: 2663-7901  
 Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-12>  
 Homepage: <https://pdfpk.net/pdf/>  
 Email: [se.jpdc@pdfpk.net](mailto:se.jpdc@pdfpk.net)

<b>Article:</b>	<b>Self- Censorship By Pakistani Journalists: Causes And Effects</b>
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<b>Published:</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2021
<b>Publisher Information:</b>	Journal of Peace, Development and Communication (JPDC)
<b>To Cite this Article:</b>	Ayoub, Muhammad, et al. (2021). "Self- Censorship By Pakistani Journalists: Causes And Effects" <i>Journal of Peace, Development and Communication</i> , vol. Volume 5, no. Issue 1, 2021, pp. 130-142, <a href="https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-12">https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-12</a>
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### **Abstract**

This study is an attempt to find out the willingness of the journalists for self-censorship, to highlight the factors which give rise to the phenomenon of self-censorship and to investigate the impact of self-censorship on the journalists' performance in Pakistan. This research has been conducted in the light of Bar-Tal model for self-censorship and it is quantitative based research. Questionnaire was distributed among 125 Islamabad-based journalists sampled through the purposive sampling method. Findings revealed that the majority of the journalists were facing self-censorship in Pakistan and they were not able to reveal the information in media without engaging in self-censorship. Researcher investigated the four factors which give rise to the phenomenon of self-censorship among the journalists in Pakistan; military, judiciary, media organization policies or media owner's pressure and job insecurity. Researcher concluded that self-censorship affects the journalists' performance, credibility, neutrality, free journalism, factual and objective reporting in Pakistan and self-censorship has negative impact on the journalists' performance in Pakistan.

**Key words:** Self-censorship, Bar-Tal model, free journalism, Censorship, Objective reporting.

## Introduction

Self-censorship is the process of restricting or suppressing an individual words and action by their own self due to some external and internal pressure. A journalist restrict them self from expressing thoughts and feeling and speaking something in the media they think that it could be harmful for them therefore they restrict and avoid the statement which is declared dangerous by journalist own self and by their own choice.

Self-censorship is the technique of withholding free speech, thoughts and expression, that is not carried out by responsible person and it practice by an individual who is responsible for the generating innovative expression to control any harmful response or effect which might be occur due expressed thoughts and speech. In fact all journalists have the elements of self-censorship while reporting and editing the information that some information would be exclude from the final report (Morris, 2016). Self-censorship is the practice occurs among the journalist due to fear of answering to question which may ask from officials or authority therefore they delete the information. They are under pressure to restricting themselves from expressing political views in their copy (Kamp,2015).

Self-censorship is the type of restricting of information by an individual to prevent any irritation or provoking others by an individual own choice, not told by any officials to censor their work. It is the practice which perform to control violence and to avoid such things which is against to advertiser, government, and media ownership. It is a tool to manipulate the communication. According to the issue of self-censorship no body directed the journalists to practice self-censorship explicitly though journalists censor themselves and do not reveal some truth because journalists feel that it might be harmful to disseminate or publish. Self-censorship is the phenomenon use to avoid dangers and sanction from government or other responsible authority, and prevent from negative consequence. In many cases, generally most of the journalist practice self-censorship for their protection and defending themselves from harmful thing and “problematic consequence” all over the world (Yesil, 2014).

Researchers have analyzed the issue of self-censorship in media and identified an array of issues like security threats, national interest and financial policies of media industries. However there is a need to further explore the causes and effects of self-censorship in Pakistan. This study mainly focuses on what are the major factors that form self-censorship among Pakistani journalists and what are the effects of the self-censorship on their journalistic performance in Pakistan.

The researcher has investigated the autonomy of the journalists with regards of free journalism in Pakistan and has examined the performance of the journalists in media in Pakistan. This study has evaluated the impact of self-censorship practice on the journalists’ performance and also identified the factors which form self-censorship among the journalists in Pakistan. This study highlighted the reasons of self-censorship which affects the journalists’ performance in Pakistan.

This study is an attempt to map out the journalists willingness for self-censorship in Pakistani media, to find out the factors that forms the self-censorship among Pakistani journalists, and to determine the perception about the impact of self-censorship on the journalists’ performance in Pakistan.

So, this study is based on the following research questions; 1. How willing are the journalists to be self-censored in Pakistan? 2. What factors give rise to the phenomenon of self-censorship among Pakistani Journalists? 3. What is the impact of self-censorship practice on the journalists’ performance in Pakistan?

Main objective of this study is to find out the willingness of the journalists for self-censorship, to highlight the factors which give rise to the phenomenon of self-censorship and to investigate the impact of self-censorship on the journalists’ performance in Pakistan

## Litrature Review

Self-censorship come from broad understanding which is existing everywhere as a daily practice by any journalist in the world due to expected selection and de selection of information while editing and information giving process in the media, Self-censorship can be evaluate that self-censorship is the process of excluding information by an individual own self due to some threat expected by authority. Self-censorship is the thing which happens in many ways in the journalist's professional work or every journalist's professional life in the society. Self-censorship is fine when it use for withholding journalists' passion which is going against the norms, moral and other believe of the society but at the same time it is worst when it influence the journalists professional work and worn them that they should not do any mistakes which is not acceptable for the existing ideology (Cipuri, 2015).

Tapsell argues that the main agent of pressure during Indonesia's new order regime was the government; today the owners of newspapers are powerful figures who exert their influence and hinder the autonomy of Indonesian journalists. The reporting or broadcasting is controlled by the owner through gatekeeper where journalist cannot say something against politician because these are basically from media owner. Most of the media moguls have affiliation with politics there for journalist cannot report against the owner of the newspaper in Indonesia. It is big issue for Indonesian media because newspaper own by famous politicians and businessmen in the country and owner inhibiting reporting against owner interest or business men, there for journalist practice self-censorship in the media. Self-censorship in Indonesia is encouraged by the powerful ruling elite, whose intention is to limit criticism of its actions (Tapsell, 2012).

The main factor which influence on the media workers are the politicians, media owners and the government and media legislation as well which impact on the freedom of speech in the Russian media. Authority utilized the media as a tool of political manipulation through targeted exercise lawful and permissible action against media holders or owners as well as broadly worded laws which prescribe criminal and civil penalties for journalists concerning such issues as libel, state interests, national security and the image of the head of state. The Law on Counteracting the terrorist movement importantly controlled the freedom of journalists and permitted authorities to regulate the activity of the media in "accordance" with their own desires and interests. The main reason of self-censorship in Russian media is official prohibition, the media industries are prohibited by the group who are trustworthy to the government (Olshevskaya, 2013).

In Autocratic and heavily centralized government use censorship tactics to suppress the opponent and in this situation journalist are not free to exercise free expression therefore they have to work using self-censorship in the country. China censored the books, magazines, news broadcast, and movies before releasing so journalist or writers become coerce to use the technique to avoid any censorship thus they come to use self-censorship technique (Al-Sharqi,2015).Self-censorship on general interest's topics because of internal pressure or media owner's financial interests as a result 55 percent practiced self-censorship about the topic which concern the general people .many people were arrested by the government over posting on social media and criticizing government, fear are increase among people for criticizing government therefore they exercise self-censorship to avoid any tension which harm them (Tanash, 2017).

Self-censorship is exercised by the American journalists during war on terror declared and led by US President George W. Bush. Free flow of information is discouraged, free expression, and free and full access to information therefore the practice of self-censorship increase and journalists self-censored the information which harm them. American's media exercise self-censorship and did not published and broadcast scientific information regarding earth warming to the American people allegedly in order to give fair reporting this was

practiced due to great planned and well funded group of deniers of climate change has been exploiting the media in order to insert climate myths and questionable economic theories into the dialogue (Bar-Tal, 2015).

In a Report in VOA by Ayesha Tanzeem accused the military that encouraging self-censorship in Pakistan. Authorities pressurize the journalist, due to which journalists is practicing self-censorship in Pakistan (Ayesha, 2018). Military and religion are considering the main reasons for self-censorship in Pakistan. Eighty percent journalists are practicing self-censorship in Pakistan when they come to religion. When the respondents were asked if they had self-censored professionally for any of 11 reasons provided in the questionnaire, a majority of journalists responded to six self-censorship reasons: due to their news organization's policy 80%, due to the sensitive nature of information 80%, to safeguard national interest 65%, to protect Pakistan's image 61%, due to fear of legal action or state persecution 57% and threat of physical harm to self and family 52% (Naeem, 2018).

The factors which create self-censorship in Pakistani media are different, according to Naeem (2018) in his research published in *Media Matters for Democracy*, 80% journalist said that they are practicing self-censorship because of the organization policies. Eighty percent journalists admitted that they are not revealing information which goes against the military and they are very care about the information which related to religion. If journalist gives information related to military and which not favor the military then he/she might be face anti Pakistani criticism.

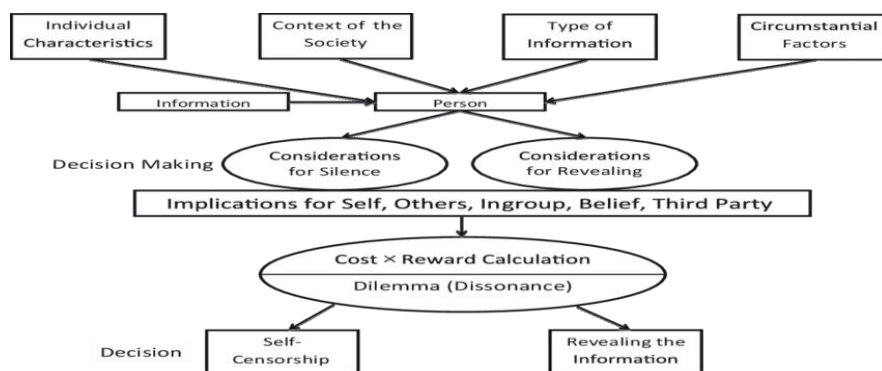
According to the literature review of this study the practice of self-censorship differ from country to country however the perception is same and common in all over the world and its meaning is similar. In this literature review researcher found some major factors that forms self-censorship among the journalists in all over the world however the factors were different for each country's journalists such as a political issue was important to one country but it was not sensitive to another country. Government considered as the major source for self-censorship for the journalists in some countries but it was not considered as the main source for self-censorship for the journalists in another country. In some countries military considered as the main factor for self-censorship but it was not considered as major source in another country so the factors differed countries to counties. According to the literature review there are some factors appeared in many countries as major factors for self-censorship that are government, military, media owners, country's security issues, media organization policies, business companies, advertisers, religion and editors.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mainly this research endeavor comes under the Bar-Tal theory of self-censorship wherein it is explained how journalists reveal the information and how they withhold or hide the information after calculating costs and rewards. So, the theoretical basis for this study has been provided in terms of the Bar-Tal model. The researcher has applied this model in this study and investigated how journalist's exercised self-censorship in Pakistan.

### **Bar-Tal model for Self-Censorship**

Theoretically this study is based on a model of self-censorship proposed by Denial Bar-Tal. According to Bar-Tal model a person or an individual applies self-censorship on him/herself because of certain reasons which are based on individual characteristics, context of the society, type of information, and on circumstantial factors. The person decides on whether the information should be revealed or hidden. It depends on the individual whether he/she reveals the information or tends to be self-censored.



Bar-Tal-Model for self-censorship

### Methodology

Survey has been used in this study to collect the data from the journalists. Sample for the study was Islamabad based journalists who were involved in reporting or dissemination of information in the media in Pakistan. The researcher has employed purposive sampling and has selected a sample of 125 who were covering different beats including court reporting, security and foreign affairs, politics, sports, health, education and other beats. Questionnaire toll was used for gathering the data. Questions were prepared in advanced and shared with journalists and they responded to each questions in the survey.

### Conceptualization

Self-censorship is the process of suppressing and withholding information by an individual without any dictation. Self-censorship of information, defined as the act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information from others in the absence of formal obstacles, it should be considered as a socio psychological barrier that prevents free access to information, obstructs freedom of expression, and harms free flow of information (Bar-tal, 2017).

Self-censorship is the technique of withholding free speech, thoughts and expression (Morris,2016). Self-censorship is the type of restricting of information by an individual to prevent any irritation or provoking others by an individual own choice (Yasil, 2014). Self-censorship occurs as exercise by a person where he/she restrain and control their own action and expressions (Ramadan, 2015).

Self-censorship is the individual consider that there is at least some cost in disclosing this information and they therefore decide to hide it (Bar-Tal, 2017). Self-censorship is a process whereby journalists are said to avoid reporting certain stories, sources, allegations, arguments, or opinions for fear that to do so might land them in some kind of trouble or difficulty with their editor , proprietor , the law, or even criminal elements (Harcup, 2014). self-censorship is control of what you say or do in order to avoid annoying or offending others, but without being told officially that such control is necessary (Cambridge). Self-censorship is the exercising of control over what one says and does, especially to avoid criticism (Oxford).

### Operationalization

Self-censorship is the process of restricting or suppressing the information by the journalists own self. It is the exercise where journalists control their words and action during reporting or revealing information in the media. Self-censorship is the practice of withholding and suppressing the information by journalists own self without official dictation, Self-Censorship appear as a practice where journalist suppress and restrict their words and actions. It is the phenomenon where journalists avoid the information to publish or broadcast which affects the journalists' performance in the media in Pakistan.

### **Explanation of the Variables**

There are ten variables given in the following which are mentioned in the questionnaire, through these variables researcher found the factors due to which journalists practiced self-censorship in media in Pakistan. What does these variables means in the study, researcher explained all the variables in the following.

#### **Advertisers**

Advertisers' means the people or companies who give advertisement to the media. Media organizations are financial supported by the advertisers through commercial ads. How journalists disclose the information in the media which is not in the favor of advertisers.

#### **Government**

Government means the authority which governs the state and regulates the administration of the country. Government is the main pillar of the state therefore media laws formulate by the government, moreover media regulate by the government through Pakistan electronic media regulating authority (PEMRA) in Pakistan.

#### **Judiciary**

Judiciary means the courts (Supreme Court, high court, special court, etc) and the judges of the courts about them how journalists report information in media in Pakistan. How journalists criticize or disclose the information in media about misconduct, corruption and wrongdoing of the judges or activities related to the judges either directly or indirectly.

#### **Job insecurity/fear of losing job**

Job insecurity or fear of losing job means journalists might be fired from their job due to disclosing some information in media which is not in the favor of media organization or related to other groups which have the influence regarding journalists jobs either directly or indirectly.

#### **Media owners or Media organizations policies**

Media owners are the person or a group of people who own the media organization (television channel, News Paper and Radio) and policies means the organized goals or a set of rules based upon media organization interest according to which journalists perform their duties in media.

#### **Military**

Military means a group of people from armed forces. How journalists criticize or disclose the information about the wrongdoing, corruption or failure of the military officers in media in Pakistan.

#### **Political parties**

Political party means an organized group of politicians which runs the democratic system in the country through electoral system and some of them make government and govern the state. How journalists criticize or disclose information in media in Pakistan about political party's wrongdoing, corruption, failure and dishonesty.

#### **Religion**

Religion means Islam and a group of people from Islamic religion who have the status of religious leader. How journalists criticize or disclose the information about these groups or person based upon their wrongdoing, misleading and how journalists report about something which is related to Islam.

#### **Terrorists**

Terrorists are the group of people who act unlawfully violence and intimidate against civilians or government for the purpose of achieving political aim. How journalists disclose the information about these unlawful violent groups which may harm the journalists for reporting against them.

### Threats to physical harm

Threats to physical harm means journalist are terrorize by someone to harm the journalist physically either to kill or injure by gun or by some other things because of disclosing information which is not in the favor of them.

### Data Analysis And Discussion

The data for this study was collected by surveying the journalists through questionnaire. Questionnaire was specially designed for this study entitled self-censorship by Pakistani journalists: causes and effects. In this study researcher mainly focused on the three questions. First question explored the willingness of the journalists about self-censorship and second question investigated the factors that form self-censorship among the journalists in Pakistan. Third question identified the impact of self-censorship on the journalists' performance in Pakistan.

The participants who participated in the research are 125 respondents out of which 68.8% are male while 31.2% are female. The majority of participant's age is From 21 to 40 years whereas 14.4% respondent's age is above from 40 years while only 3% percent participant's age is above 50 years. According to the qualification of the participants, majority participants are MA, MSC qualified. Seventy two percent respondent's qualification is M.A MSC or 16 years education while 16% participant's qualification is B.A whereas M Phil qualified respondents is 7% while 76% percent journalists from television whereas 22% belongs to print media.

Majority of the journalists are reporters and they are 78% while 13% are anchors and 9% are editors whereas 5% were working in other fields. Majority of the respondent's experience are more than 10 years and they are 36% while 28% respondent's experience is 3 to 6 years, 20% journalists' experience is 7 to 10 years whereas less than 3 years experienced journalists are 16%. The journalists who participated in the research are from different beats where 27% journalists from court reporting, 15% from parliamentary reporting and 21% from general beats while 24% from other beats like some are anchors and some are editors whereas 12% journalists from diplomatic and foreign affairs beat, health reporting and election commission. According to the medium, 98% journalists were working for national media while 1.6% journalists were working for local media, 84.8% journalists were working for Urdu language medium whereas 12.8% worked in English medium. Majority of the journalists were working for national level media and they worked for Urdu language medium.

According to the journalist's willingness regarding self-censorship, 57.6% journalists said that they cannot reveal the information in media without engaging in self-censorship. According to the findings majority of the journalists cannot reveal the information in media in Pakistan and journalists are coerced to choose alternate way to perform their duties. Eighty four percent journalists responded that it is important to self-censor some times. a significant number of journalists said that practicing of self-censorship is important, without practicing self-censorship is difficult for the journalists to perform their duties in media in Pakistan because there are many news come to journalists which is not reportable as it is and journalists have some social responsibilities as well, but mean while some news prefer by the journalists to self-censored because of some pressure and they don't want to put their jobs and life in trouble, so they choose to practice self-censorship rather than revealing the information in media.

From the participants 26% journalists said that military is the main influential element of self-censorship for them and they thought that military has strong power to influence the journalist's reporting in media. This study found that Journalists are being careful while giving information regarding military in media in Pakistan. They cannot criticize the military officers or a group of military persons for their wrongdoing and corruption. 21.6%



journalists said that media organization policies or media owners is the great influential element for self-censorship because they set the policies and run those information which is according to their policies and interest therefore journalists cannot report the information which is against their organization owners or organization policies, 18% journalists said judiciary is the influential element of self-censorship for them and journalists worried about court of contempt while giving information in media and they thought judiciary may call them before the court. Journalists cannot criticize and expose the information about corruption and wrongdoing of the judges in media in Pakistan while 15% participants thought that job insecurity is the main influential element of self-censorship for the journalists in Pakistan.

Researcher asked from the journalists that what kind of information are they likely to self-censor in their professional interaction and he gave ten variables in the option where 30% respondents said that they self-censor the information about the military and they don't reveal the information which is against a group of military based upon their misconduct or wrongdoing, 24% journalists said that they self-censor the information which creates job insecurity whereas 12.8% participants said, they self-censor the information about judiciary because they don't want to be called themselves by the judiciary to appear before the court in allegation about contempt of court or some other charges so they prefer to practice self-censorship rather than revealing the information in media related to judiciary, 11.2% participants responded that they self-censor the information about media owners or media organization policies while 8% journalists said that they self-censor the information about religion whereas 13% journalists self-censor the information about different variables that are government, advertiser, political parties, terrorists and others.

Researcher asked different questions from the journalists through questionnaire in the survey and found the impact of self-censorship on the journalists' performance in Pakistan. Journalists responded to a question about the impact of self-censorship on the journalist's credibility where 60% journalists admitted that exercising self-censorship affects the journalist's credibility in Pakistan. Researcher asked a question from the journalists that does self-censorship make them safer, 80.8% journalists responded that practicing self-censorship make them safe while. Significant number of journalists admitted that exercising of self-censorship make them safe therefore the ratio of practicing self-censorship is increasing in media in Pakistan. Journalists responded about the country's environment for the journalism where 73.6% journalists said that the country's environment is not conducive to practice journalism without engaging in self-censorship.

Researcher asked from the journalists that, do you agree that self-censorship is more damaging than censorship for the free journalism in Pakistan where 44.8% journalists responded that the exercise of self-censorship in media is more damaging then self-censorship in Pakistan but 55.2% journalists sad that practicing self-censorship is not damaging more than censorship. Most of the journalists believed that exercising self-censorship is damaging but not that much damaging as censorship damage the free journalism in Pakistan.

Though majority of the journalists assumed that self-censorship is not damaging more than censorship and they considered that censorship is more harmful for the free journalism in Pakistan whereas self-censorship is not much harmful as censorship harm free journalism. Due to the censorship journalists will not be able to freely report in media and they cannot freely exercise their duties to disseminate the information to the people through media.

### **Conclusion**

Researcher has found out that 87% journalists are facing the phenomenon of self-censorship and they are not able to reveal the information in media without engaging in self-censorship while 50% journalists willingly practiced self-censorship whereas 52% journalists

did not preferred to practice self-censorship in media, 84% journalists thought that it is important to practice self-censorship in media in Pakistan.

In this study researcher has explored four main factors which give rise to the phenomenon of self-censorship among the journalists in Pakistan. These four factors are military, judiciary, media organization's policies or media owner's pressure and job insecurity.

According to the findings 61% of the journalists had practiced self-censorship due to the military and they considered military is the main influential element for self-censorship for them and they likely self-censor the information about military while in the 2<sup>nd</sup> position media organization policies or media owners and job insecurity are considered as the main factor due to which journalists had practiced self-censorship in media in Pakistan. Media policies or media owners and job insecurity are interrelated factors which form self-censorship among the journalists in Pakistan whereas in the third position journalists declared that judiciary is the main factor, which give rise to the phenomenon of self-censorship among the journalists in Pakistan.

Self-censorship affects the journalists' performance, credibility, neutrality, free journalism, factual and objective reporting in Pakistan and self-censorship has negative impact on the journalists' performance in Pakistan. Despite exercising of self-censorship, majority of the journalists could perform their duties independently without engaging in self-censorship in media in Pakistan. Majority of the journalists considered that practicing self-censorship is not much harmful as censorship harm free journalism in Pakistan.

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