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Article:	Role of Owners of Media Organizations in the Practice of Self-Censorship
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of owners of media organizations in the practice of self-censorship in Pakistani media. It also explores how the owners' interference in the affairs of journalists affects their right to expression and strengthens the practice of self-censorship in the media. In the current scenario of Pakistan, self-censorship is becoming more visible among the ranks of journalists which affect the democratic process. At the moment, general elections 2024 are underway in the country and the people need to know the prevailing political situation in its true spirit but the practice of self-censorship hampering the right to know of the masses. Most journalists are paid nominal salaries and work on an ad hoc and contractual basis. Their respective media organizations do not even give the majority of journalists permanent appointment letters, and they are purely working on the sweet will of their media organizations. The owners use the media as a tool to safeguard their other businesses, and journalists are forced to protect their business interests. To achieve these objectives, the study employs the quantitative method of survey and the qualitative method of interviews. Data was collected from 366 journalists working in five cities of Pakistan, including Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, and Quetta. Twenty interviews with journalists, four each from each city, were conducted. For data collection, a simple random sampling of probability sampling method was used. The findings reveal that the interference of the owners has extreme effects on the journalists' performance, democratic process, declining the public trust over the media's information and it is one of the main factors in the practice of self-censorship in Pakistani media.

Key Words: Self-censorship, Owners, Media organizations, Journalists, Contractual jobs

Introduction:

This study discovers the role of owners of media organizations in self-censorship in Pakistani media. Journalists are not autonomous in selecting new stories to work on it. The interference of owners and other top management in the journalistic work of journalists has increased over the last couple of years. Owners of media organizations force journalists to follow their guidelines, and these guidelines serve the owners' interests. The undue interference of owners is a threat to objective journalism and freedom of expression in Pakistan. At the cost of independent journalism, they promote their business interests. Earlier, editors were powerful in deciding the matters of the media organizations as their words used to be final, but in the last couple of years, the interference of the owners has increased in journalists' affairs. The owners of the media outlets were already involved in the financial matters of the news organizations, but now their interference has also increased in editorial affairs. Now, journalists self-censor the news story as per the policy of the media news organizations. There is a need in the prevailing situation to research how media practitioners are compelled to practice self-censorship. Journalists remain careful in selecting news stories for the reason of internal and external gatekeepers to secure the interests of the owners of the media outlets. The gatekeeping theory describes that there are 'forces' that either assist or control the channels in the selection of news stories or issues. This study explores how interference from the owners of media organizations promotes self-censorship among journalists in the media of Pakistan. The owners of the media organizations work as gatekeepers, and the study will help to understand how the process of gatekeeping works in this scenario.

The state of freedom of expression of the journalists has deteriorated to a level that media owners ask their employee journalists to delete their own tweets and posts on social media which are critical of the government and military because they were under pressure from some 'influential quarters' (Ajmal, 2019). Economic pressure also forces journalists to observe self-censorship. Media practitioners are likely to work ethically and honestly to strengthen democracy by delivering reliable information to the audience. However, besides pressure groups, economic and political elites also use media for their vested interests due to the political economy of the media. As journalists are underpaid, therefore, they face serious economic issues. These problems compel journalists to practice self-censorship in favour of those who pay them. In this way, the owners of their media organizations force them to compromise their professionalism so that they may be able to feed their families (Hughes & Márquez-Ramírez, 2017). The majority of journalists in Pakistan are getting very low salaries, and the owners of the news organizations follow their own vested political and financial interests by promoting the culture of self-censorship. The Seven Wage Board Award was a ray of hope for journalists as the government recommended a reasonable salary increase. But the owners of the news organizations labelled the award an unaffordable burden for the financial health of the media organizations (Riaz, 2011).

Owners of news organizations also run other businesses; therefore, as a strategy, journalists practice self-censorship to save the businesses of the owners of their respective media organizations (Sarwar, 2006). The owners and the government do not care about the personal welfare of the journalists in Pakistan. Journalists also face the threat of job insecurity which hinders independent journalism. The journalists are paid fewer salaries which forces them to practice self-censorship. Due to the political economy of the media, the political and

economic elites use media for their interests. The owners of media organizations and politicians both exploit working journalists to serve the vested interests of each other, like the promotion of the politicians and increasing the profit of the owners (Saeed et al., 2018). In Pakistan, the government, establishment, Owners of news organizations, advertisers, war on terror, religious and ethnic groups and societal pressures, press laws, and political parties control the freedom of expression. Through different means, both democratic and dictatorial regimes control the press in the country. Other factors like political factors, financial interests of the owners of news organizations, and policies of the media outlets also control the publication of many issues in the media (AhsanBhatti, 2021). Apart from others, owners of news organizations are involved in self-censorship. Advertisements are necessary for the survival of news organizations. The advertisers and the government keep the owners silent through advertisements. The privately-owned companies use the advertisements as leverage by keeping the owners of the media outlets under pressure. The owners further force the journalists to be aligned with the advertisers (Yesil, 2014). The government only not creates an environment of self-censorship, and the senior hierarchy of the news organizations, including owners, publishers, and senior editors also involved in it. These officeholders decide which story to cover and how to cover it (Ponkey, 2012).

Research Questions

1. Do journalists not have complete freedom in reporting?
2. Do news organizations interfere in the work of journalists?
3. Do owners of media organizations Promote their business interests?

Literature Review

The literature review is about the current research studies carried out by various researchers on self-censorship due to the interference of owners of media outlets. In the present day, the interference of the media's owners has increased in Pakistani media, which affects the practice of self-censorship. Journalists are diverting towards social media platforms to work independently and with liberty. The personal welfare of the journalists is neglected in Pakistan on the part of owners and the governments. The media owners and the politicians are more enthusiastic about serving each other's vested interests, like increasing profit and publicity. The non-implementation of the wage board award for journalists is a classic example of the unity of owners and the government or politicians. Second, various means, including owners' interference, threats, torture, arrests, feudal influence, and job insecurity, are used to stop journalists from working freely (Memon, 2015).

The owners of the media outlets have kept the journalists in jobs on a contract or ad-hoc basis, forcing them to practice self-censorship. In such situations, it is easy for the owners to interfere in the work of journalists. In Pakistani media, there is no suitable service structure for journalists. In South Asian countries, several factors restrict press freedom, and the contractual jobs of journalists are one of the reasons. The contract jobs of the journalists compel them to increase their income through other sources, which results in practising self-censorship among journalists (Mezzera & Sial, 2010). In Pakistan, most journalists are engaged in media organizations on a contract basis with very low salaries. Such an environment keeps journalists in low esteem (Siraj & Hussain, 2017). Owners of media outlets denied even basic facilities to journalists. Journalists in Pakistani media lacking service structure, pension, and other economic benefits like travelling allowance, overtime, etc. Financial issues of journalists in

Pakistan include no salary or nominal salary, no payment of overtime, and no day allowance/travelling allowance. Journalists lack pension, service structure, registration system, license system, residential facilities, and other such basic facilities (Adnan et al., 2019). Owners of the news organizations, the editorial policy of the media outlets, media's laws and regulations, and competition with other media organizations are the significant hurdles to journalistic autonomy in Pakistan. Journalists needed independence in the selection of news stories, power to emphasize the different aspects of the stories and editorial coordination (Hassan, Iqbal, Fazal, & Kit, 2021; Siraj & Hussain, 2017). In Pakistani print media (Nadadur, 2007) discovered some direct eternal causes of self-censorship. The significant causes of self-censorship were explored as unofficial government control over media, the oligopolistic ownership structure of newspapers, Pakistan's legal system, and the lack of any security system for journalists.

Advertisements are a powerful factor in the practice of self-censorship, as the media's owners prefer it at the cost of independent journalism. Big companies and corporations use advertisements as a tool to keep the owners of media outlets silent over their illegal work. There is always a need for the news outlets and the state to have good relations for the award of official advertisements (Hughes & Márquez-Ramírez, 2017). Journalists observe self-censorship owing to advertisements of the corporate sector. The nexus of media outlets and corporations lead to the unconscious practice of self-censorship. The practice of self-censorship in media affects freedom of expression, and political pressure restricts the freedom of media (Wasserman & Maweu, 2014). Self-censorship is also a hurdle in the flourishing of democracy. The nexus of large business corporations and the public authorities resulted in the common practice of self-censorship in the media through advertisements. This creates public distress, which is unfriendly to democracy and human dignity (Thorgeirsdóttir, 2005). The commercial interests of the media's owners create a situation where the government and the owners support each other, particularly in countries where the government controls the advertisements' flow. Publicity and positive image building among the people are oxygen for the government policies/politicians in the media. Therefore, such relationships between the owners of the news organizations and the government actually impact the journalists' professional and personal development and their life and working conditions (Memon, 2015).

In other parts of the world, media outlets also practice self-censorship for their vested interests. As per Albanian freedom houses ownership of media is not transparent, and news organizations practice self-censorship to secure the owners' political and business interests. In the 2014 Albania progress report, the European Commission highlighted the lack of transparency in media financing which is a great hurdle to freedom of expression. The media was used as a tool to promote the financial and political interests of the owners. The lack of execution of labour rights of journalists exposed them to removal from their jobs and forced them to self-censorship (Halo et al., 2015). One of the reasons for the practice of self-censorship is the political interests of the owners. In the United Kingdom and the United States, there is an important positive relationship between political interests and self-censorship. In these two countries, political interest are a significant indicator of enhanced self-censorship in the media. In the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and France, there is an important and positive relationship between the political use of media and self-censorship. The interests of the owners and the journalists are a reason for self-censorship (Dubois & Szwarc, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

For this research study, the researcher employed ‘gatekeeping’ as a theoretical framework. Gatekeeping and communication, for the first time, appeared in the unfinished academic work of Kurt Lewin's ‘Frontier in Group Dynamics’. This work of Lewin posthumously came to the limelight in 1947.

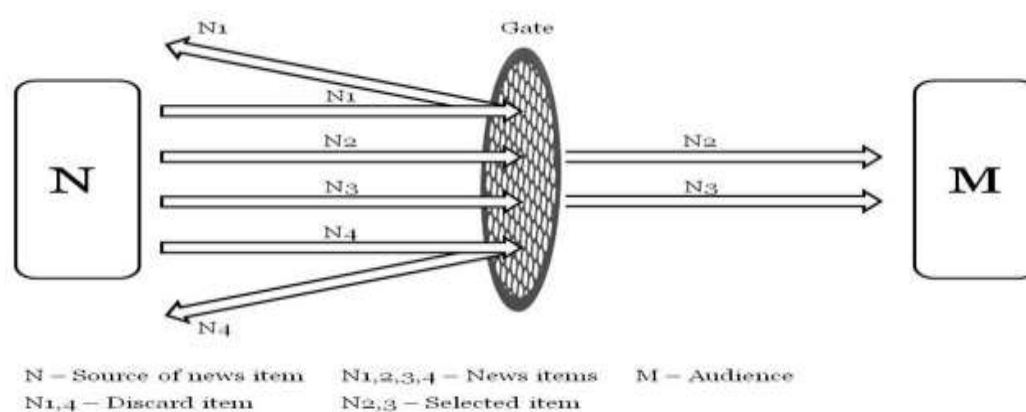
History and core assumption of Gatekeeping theory

Gatekeeping is one of the oldest theories in mass communication research. The gatekeeping process was first proposed by Kurt Lewin, a psychologist, in his research conducted after World War II on social change. Initially, this theory was not applied to mass communication research, but the author of this theory opined that ‘Items’ passing through channels selected or rejected could be applied to the flow of news. In 1950, a communication scholar David Manning picked up the gatekeeping idea. In mass communication, gatekeeping is the process through which possible news messages are shaped, examined, and produced to be communicated by the media. In mass communication gatekeeping is an overall process by which the social reality transmitted by the media is constructed, and not just a decision of in and out. The gatekeeping theory has the concept that news events have ‘forces’ that either permit or restrict the channel through the gatekeeping process. The forces may be different in polarity and strength, which means that the forces might be positive or negative (Shoemaker et al., 2001).

In the media gatekeeping process, some levels are maintained. At the individual level, journalists alone decide the news selection. At the routine practices level, journalists along with the ethics and policies of news organizations, decide about the selection of news. At the social institutions level, some external forces like government, advertisers, regulators, etc. determine the selection of news. At the ideological level, social values, culture, pressure groups, and ethnicity determine the criteria for news selection (Shabir et al., 2015).

3.2 Model of Gatekeeping theory

The self-censorship process can be further better understood from the Kurt Zadek Lewin Model shown below.



Gate Keeping Theory

Source: Kurt Zadek Lewin (1890-1947)

Fig. 2.1

Relation between Gatekeeping and self-censorship

Through the process of gatekeeping, numerous pieces of information are selected and crafted into limited messages to be communicated to the people on a daily basis. Reporters and editors work as gatekeepers in selecting and crafting information to be delivered to the people as they control the content and style of messages (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Welbers et al., 2018). A self-censorship is an act of holding back some news from the audience because there is a chance that the audience may respond in a negative way to that information; as a consequence, the communicator might face some negative repercussions. The communicator works as a gatekeeper in selecting and crafting information as per the requirements of the environment (Hayes et al., 2005; Hayes et al., 2006). Another researcher Steele (2018) also recommended gatekeeping theory be used to examine the attempts of self-censorship. Therefore, in light of the above discussion, the gatekeeping theory is suitable to be used as a theoretical framework for this research study.

Research Methodology

The phenomenon of self-censorship in Pakistani media has been explored in this research study. The research methodologies that can best answer the research questions reflected in this study are 'Survey and Interview method'. For data collection, the researcher used both quantitative method of survey and qualitative method of Interview. A well-written questionnaire and interviews were employed to get the opinions of senior journalists, bureau chiefs/ or resident editors.

The researcher collected the data directly from the journalists by visiting the five press clubs of Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, and Quetta and the offices of the media houses in these cities. Questionnaires were distributed among 382 journalists, and 366 of them responded. According to the proportional allocation method, the sample size from Islamabad is 141, and 136 of them responded. From Peshawar, out of 19 sample all respondents responded. Similarly, from Lahore, out of 134 journalists, 126 responded, and from Karachi, out of 82 respondents, 79 of them responded to the survey method. While from Quetta, all 6 journalists responded. So, the response rate was recorded as 95.81 %.

4.1 Population

4.1.1. Survey

The population of this research study for survey is the journalists working in Islamabad, the federal capital of Pakistan, and four provincial capitals of Pakistan, including Peshawar of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Lahore of Punjab, Karachi of Sindh, and Quetta of Baluchistan provinces. The surveyed journalists engaged in various news organizations were associated with their respective press clubs. With the Islamabad press club total of 3182 journalists were engaged, Lahore 3030, Peshawar 430, Karachi 1861, and Quetta press club 140 journalists. So the total population was 8643. Journalists of all ages and gender participated in the survey. They were connected with print media, including Newspapers/periodicals, and electronic media, including Television, Radio, and online media.

4.1.2. Interviews

The population of this research study for Interviews is the journalists registered with the press club of Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi and Quetta. The interviewed journalists engaged in various news organizations were associated with their respective press clubs. The researcher

used a convenient sampling technique for interviews with the senior journalists, Bureau chiefs/ or Resident Editors working with print or electronic media. The experience of the journalists was not less than five years. Twenty interviews were conducted, four each from the journalists of Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, and Quetta. After fixing times with them, the researcher visited the interviewed journalists.

4.2. Sample size

As per the election result of the press clubs, the total number of journalists of five press clubs, including Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta, is 8643.

The sample size for the survey method of this research study was ascertained according to Slovin's formula.

4.2.1. Sample size for each press club

Further, the sample size from each press club was carried out as per the proportional allocation method. The sample size is selected from all strata proportionally according to the size of strata.

Table 4-1: Allocation of the required sample size of the selected Press Clubs

Description	Total Population	Approach	Sample size calculated
Total population	8643	Slovin	382
Islamabad press club	3182	Proportional allocation	141
Peshawar press club	430	-----	19
Lahore press club	3030	-----	134
Karachi press club	1861	-----	82
Quetta	140	-----	6

4.3. Sampling Technique

4.3.1. Survey

A simple random sampling of probability sampling method was employed for data collection in the survey method. In quantitative methods, researchers mostly trust random sampling for data collection and the result attained through such methods is easy to compare, generalize and summarize (Showkat & Parveen, 2017).

4.3.2. Interviews

For data collection, the researcher employed convenience sampling of nonprobability sampling method for data collection in the semi-structured interviews.

Academic researchers generally approve the convenience sampling - available by means of accessibility. Numerous social science investigations are carried out on University students, and educational field researchers undertake educational research in their own schools and classrooms (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

4.4. Limitations of Research study

The researcher faced the following limitations.

1. There was the least cooperation on the part of journalists during data collection.
2. The research environment in Pakistan was not strong enough and media practitioners were not much sensitized about the significance of academic research.
3. Due to the crisis in the media industry, the researcher faced problems getting research data as the strength of the journalists has decreased considerably as a great number of journalists had been sacked by the news outlets for the financial crisis in the media industry.

Finding and Analysis

1. Journalists' freedom in reporting
2. News organizations' interference in the work of journalists
3. Self-censorship and media organizations' business interests

5.2. Data Analysis/Results

5.2.1. Journalists' freedom in reporting

A majority of surveyed journalists agreed that they are not enjoying complete freedom in reporting due to the interference of the owners of their news organizations. This can be seen in table 5-1. The role of news organizations is very important in the freedom of the press, but media organizations face pressure from various quarters. The constitution of the country guarantees press freedom in Pakistan.

Table 5-1: Journalists' freedom in reporting

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean Likert Scale Value
Islamabad	13 9.5%	43 31.6%	07 5.1%	56 41.1 %	17 12.5 %	136 100%	3.15
Peshawar	01 5.2 %	07 36.8 %	04 21.0%	04 21.9%	03 15.7%	19 100%	3.05
Lahore	09 7.1 %	43 34.1%	06 4.7%	53 42.0%	15 11.9%	126 100%	3.17
Karachi	06 7.5 %	29 36.7%	04 5.0%	29 36.7%	11 13.9%	79 100%	3.12
Quetta	00 0 %	01 16.6 %	01 16.6%	03 50.0 %	01 16.6 %	06 100%	3.66
Total	29 7.9 %	123 33.6 %	22 6.0%	145 39.6 %	47 12.8%	366 100%	

The majority of surveyed journalists in four cities agreed that their respective news organizations don't provide them with complete independence in reporting. At the same time, a slight majority of journalists in the city of Peshawar disagreed.

5.2.2. News organizations interference in the work of journalists

Journalists are not provided with an independent environment to work in, and news organizations have a check on their work. The majority of respondents agreed that their respective news organizations interfere in their journalistic work. This can be seen in table 5-2.

Table 5-2: News organizations interference in the work of journalists

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean Likert Scale Value
Islamabad	09 6.6%	29 21.3%	06 4.4%	79 58.0%	13 9.5%	136 100%	3.42
Peshawar	03 15.7%	05 26.3%	03 15.7%	07 36.8%	01 5.2%	19 100%	2.89
Lahore	09 7.1%	25 19.7%	06 4.7%	77 61.1%	09 7.1%	126 100%	3.41
Karachi	04 5.0%	16 20.2%	03 3.7%	49 62.0%	07 8.8%	79 100%	3.49
Quetta	00 0%	00 0%	01 16.6%	03 50.0%	02 33.3%	06 100%	4.16
Total	25 6.6%	75 20.4%	19 5.1%	215 58.7%	32 8.7%	366 100%	

An overwhelming majority of the surveyed journalists in four cities of the country have similarities in their views about the interference of media outlets in their journalistic work. Only in the city of Peshawar an equal number of the respondents agreed and disagreed with the viewpoint.

5.2.3. Self-censorship and media organizations' business interests

This section shows that owners of media outlets use their media as a protective shield to promote their own business interests. When owners of news organizations protect their business interests, then there will be a compromise on press freedom by forcing journalists into self-censorship. This can be shown in table 5-3.

Table 5-3: Self-censorship and media organizations' business interests

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean Likert Scale Value
Islamabad	04 2.9%	14 10.2%	11 8.0%	90 66.1%	17 12.5%	136 100%	3.75
Peshawar	01 5.2%	04 21.0%	02 10.5%	08 42.1%	04 21.0%	19 100%	3.52
Lahore	04 3.1%	17 13.4%	09 7.1%	77 61.1%	19 15.0%	126 100%	3.71
Karachi	03 3.7%	07 8.8%	08 10.1%	52 65.8%	09 11.3%	79 100%	3.72
Quetta	00 0%	00 0%	01 16.6%	02 33.3%	03 50.0%	06 100%	4.33
Total	12 3.2%	42 11.4%	31 8.4%	229 62.5%	52 14.2%	366 100%	

An overwhelming majority of journalists in all five cities agreed that the owners of the news organizations promote their business interests through journalism.

Table 5-4: Association between the existence of self-censorship and self-censorship in reporting

Do journalists not have complete freedom in reporting	Self-Censorship	M= 3.23 SD= 0.24
Do news organizations interfere in the work of journalists	Self-Censorship	M= 3.48 SD= 0.45
Promotion of business interests by Media Organization	Self-Censorship	M= 3.80 SD= 0.30

5.3.1. Journalists complete freedom in reporting?

While answering this question, the participants showed an agreed level with an average value of 3.23 with a Standard Deviation of 0.24, as shown in table 5-4. The respondents of Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, and Peshawar, as shown in table 5-1, revealed a moderate level of agreement, having values of 3.15, 3.17, 3.12, and 3.05, respectively. Whereas the journalists of Quetta showed their strong agreement having a value of 3.66 regarding the complete freedom of journalists in reporting.

Overall, there is a commonality of views among the majority of the journalists in all five selected cities of Pakistan that they are not enjoying complete freedom while fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

Other researchers who worked in the same area also support this result. It is hard for journalists to work without restrictions and independently. Independent journalism without freedom of expression could not be practiced anywhere. The research study (Ricchiardi, 2012) confirms that the media of Pakistan has been ranked by the Freedom House as not free. State and non-state actors do not tolerate critical reporting. Threats and physical attacks against journalists affect their work. Other researchers (Shami et al., 2021) concluded that the government and establishment in Pakistan pressure journalists to mold the content of news stories according to their interests. As a result, journalists are forced to practice self-censorship and the sense of insecurity and less freedom to keep a check on journalists.

5.3.2. News organizations' interference in the work of journalists

While addressing this question overall, an agreed level of the average value of 3.48 with a Standard Deviation of 0.45 was observed among the respondents, as shown in table 5-4. The respondents of Peshawar city remained neutral, having a value of 2.89, as shown in table 5-2, and the respondents of Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi revealed a moderate level of agreement, having values of 3.42, 3.41, and 3.49, respectively. While the respondents of Quetta showed a strong agreement level of 4.16 about the owners of media organizations' interference in the work of journalists.

The media organizations, i.e., owners of media organizations and other top management, compel the affiliated journalists to follow their guidelines. These guidelines, in fact, serve the interests of the owners of news organizations. At the cost of independent journalism, the owners promote their business interests.

Interviews conducted for the study also support the result that the media organisations' owners interfere in journalists' work. Respondent 3 informed that a few years earlier and today's journalism differ. Earlier editors were powerful in decision-making, and now the owners' influence in journalists' affairs has increased. The owners not only interfere with the news organisations' commercial affairs but also increase their involvement in editorial affairs. According to respondent 4, news organizations have established some parameters for the affiliated journalists, who are forced to follow them. Every organization has its own policy, and journalists self-censor the news stories according to the policy of the media organizations. Respondent 13 said that there is 100 percent interference of the owners in the affairs of the journalists.

Other researchers also support the result. According to (Memon, 2015) owners of news organizations in Pakistan influence media content. (Riaz & Taj, 2017) argued that the owners of news organizations in Pakistan control media content as journalists do not have enough freedom.

5.3.3. Media organizations' promotion of self-censorship by promoting their business interests

The average value of the Likert Scale in table 5-4 was observed as 3.80 with a Standard Deviation of 0.30, which shows that an important number of respondents reported agreement regarding the promotion of business interests by the owners of news organizations. If we look into table 5-3, it was reflected that the respondents of the cities of Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, and Karachi portrayed an agreed Likert scale with values of 3.75, 3.52, 3.71, and 3.72, respectively. While in the city of Quetta, a strong level of agreement of 4.33 was observed about media organizations' promotion of business interests. News organizations are implementing the practice of self-censorship for their own vested interests. The owners encourage self-censorship by forcing affiliated journalists where their business interests are in jeopardy.

The respondents of the interviews also support this result.

Respondents 1, 12 and 17 said that the owners of the news organizations are not working journalists. Their mission is not to practice independent and objective journalism but to promote their economic interests. They are running other businesses like educational institutions, real estate, etc. The owners want to promote their other businesses by favouring the government at the cost of independent and objective journalism. Respondents 2, 13, 14, 15, and 15 informed that the media owners are managed through money and power. Journalists are forced to practice self-censorship to promote the owners' political, economic and other interests.

Other researchers also support this result. The research study of (Martin, 2019) uncovered that news organizations implement self-censorship as their owners are not ready to threaten their business interests. Other researchers (Adnan et al., 2019) found that the owners of news organizations have other various businesses. They are more focused on their business profit than practicing quality journalism. This attitude on the part of the owners of news organizations encourages self-censorship among journalists. The research study of (Shabir et al., 2020) revealed that in Pakistan, the owners of media organizations are more interested in

flourishing their business by influencing the content of media. The business interests of the media owners work as gatekeepers to check journalists' professional work.

Discussion and Conclusion

In Pakistan, for different reasons, journalists practice self-censorship. Various actors, including owners of media organizations put pressure on journalists for their vested interests by manipulating media content. The financial and political interests of the owners force media practitioners to practice self-censorship, and journalists follow their dictates to save their jobs. In Pakistan, a majority of owners are not professional journalists. Most owners have established media organizations to secure their other business empires. They least bother about the promotion of quality journalism in the country. The findings of this research study align with the existing literature that media practitioners in Pakistan follow the directions of media owners and resort to self-censorship. A research study (Memon, 2015) argues that in Pakistan, the media owners manipulate the content broadcast or published to protect their own vested interests. Other researchers (Riaz & Taj, 2017) disclose that in Pakistan, journalists don't have sufficient freedom, and the owners have control over media content. The research study (Martin, 2019) informs that owners implement self-censorship because they are unwilling to risk their business interests.

As per (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) the basic assumption of the gatekeeping theory is that information transferred by the media impacts what occurs in society and creates social reality. The concept of gatekeeping is to control the flow of information through gates or filters. It is basically a judgement or decision on what information should be gathered, analysed and shared. Gatekeepers are those who make decisions on what information should be published or transmitted and how it should be shaped and presented. These are norms or forces of the profession. In Pakistan, journalists practice self-censorship under gatekeeping theory. These are for different factors, including media owners, pressure groups, government regulations, lack of service structure for journalists and others.

Journalists collect, analyse and transmit information to the entire social system. Based on personal and professional experience, gatekeepers let some information to communicate to the masses and stop some information that might be based on biases or some other social factors. Many significant news stories don't make their way through gates to the masses, while many less important stories get published or transmitted to the public. These gates are controlled by some influential people who wish to exploit the media to create a worldview that fulfils their needs. Journalists are well aware of the owners' inclination and practice self-censorship accordingly. The practice of self-censorship has ruined the very spirit of journalism. Hence, this factor of gatekeeping in Pakistan is actively in practice, according to the analysis of this study.

Self-censorship is a great obstacle to press freedom and freedom of expression, and people are deprived of actual information. Freedom of expression, freedom of speech and access to information are the basic rights of the masses. Freedom of expression is ensured in democratic societies through institutional protection. In any society, for the smooth functioning of democracy, freedom of expression is a fundamental condition. However, freedom of expression and freedom of speech cannot be ensured for journalists in the presence of the interference of the owners of media organizations in the affairs of working journalists.

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