

JOURNALISM, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

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Journal Homepage: <https://jpolas.com>**Perception of Media Freedom in Pakistan from Journalist's Perceptive****Lala Rukh¹**¹Executive, Commercial Brands, Central Business District Punjab, Pakistan.Email: lala.rukh@cbdpunjab.gov.pk**Muhammad Usman Saeed²**²Assistant Professor, Media Studies, Bayan College, Oman.Email: usman@bayancollege.edu.com**Abstract**

The research is designed to study media freedom in Pakistan, in reference to journalistic independence. To understand the levels of media freedom in the perception of journalists themselves, a survey was conducted on 120 senior journalists of mainstream print, electronic, and social media. This study aims to explore the relationship between journalistic independence and media freedom in Pakistan. This research has also observed the reasons for the downfall of media freedom in Pakistan. The model that was applied in this study is the Hierarchy of Influences Model by Shoemaker and Reese to measure the factors affecting media freedom. The Institutional theory by Meyer and Rowen was also applied to this research. A quantitative research method was used, and data was collected with the help of a survey through purposive sampling. The study has figured out from the analysis of journalists' perceptions that there is lack of media freedom and journalistic independence in Pakistan.

Keywords: Media concentration, media ownership, media freedom, content diversity, journalistic independence.

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1 Introduction

Walter Lippman, a renowned American journalist and social scientist, addressed at the International Press Institute Assembly, London, in 1965 and said, "a free press is not a privilege, but an organic necessity in a great society." This explains how essential freedom of the press is for any state. Media is considered the fourth pillar of the state in a democratic country. It plays a significant role in educating, informing, and entertaining the masses. The media is responsible for making the citizens aware of the latest happenings related to socio-economic and political developments in a country and around the globe. Media has a strong influence on society; therefore, its responsibility has exponentially increased. Media freedom refers to the idea of unrestricted media, including television, radio, and nowadays, social media. The democratic societies ought to practice a free press. A controlled media fractures democracy. It is widely believed that compromised freedom of the press is greatly responsible for weakening the media industry and it does not make any contributing towards 'informed opinion' (Soni, 2018). According to Khattak (2017), the phenomenon of regularized and self-censored media is increasing and taking deep roots in Pakistani journalism. "The Pakistani media are viewed as among the freest in Asia yet are focused by fanatic gatherings, Islamist associations, and state knowledge offices, which are all on RSF's rundown of Predators of Press Freedom (Reporters Without Borders, 2017).

The Media Ownership Theory is a popular theory of Altschull that suggests that the content of the press is directly correlated with the interest of those who finance the press. The owners of a media organization have the ultimate power over the news content. To understand this better, an analysis can be made of the ownership pattern of *GEO News* and *ARY News* on news content and interviews conducted by different journalists during the 2014 Azadi March by a Pakistani political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Similarly, the long march announced by the same political party against the government in May 2022 got varying coverage on both media channels. While breaking news over their

respective channels, both channels were contradictory to each other, which clearly shows that either one or both of the media channels were satisfying the personal interests of the media owners. This was evident when *GEO News* announced a successful deal between the government and PTI, and on the other hand, *ARY News* clarified the news defying any claims of a deal being made. Media ownership often applies restrictions over the delivery of specific media content, which depicts that economics (ownership) is more critical than ideology (content). The discrimination in media channels was also noticeable when in a government press conference in Lahore in 2022, Maryam Nawaz, Vice President of Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N), demanded the removal of *ARY News*' media equipment and restricted them from covering her press conference. Most media channels are biased and influenced by certain financial or power factors. These media channels make use of sensationalism to increase their ratings. The commercialism of media serves only the sponsors rather than the public (Dahlmann, 2009). The content being broadcasted in Pakistan does not meet the sole responsibilities of the media. They lack in objectivity, balance, fairness, and the difference between a fact and a rumour. Most journalists are seen to be imposing their perspective of the issue on the public rather than being objective about it. It is also studied that the discussion conducted on a talk show is biased and influenced by the financiers. The media channels and anchors only present the news and information in their favour. Due to this, the role of Pakistani media has moved from interpretation to misinterpretation of facts. The media does not represent the totality of the given situation (Riaz, 2015). The editorial policies of an organization often bind journalists in a compromised work. The journalistic freedom in Pakistan is also at stake due to specific security issues and life threats. Although extremists' deadly assaults on Pakistani media workers have altogether declined in recent years, basically because of the country's military activities and the inevitable removal of different aggressor bunches from the ancestral territories lining Afghanistan. Journalists, nowadays feel more scared by state investigation, dejection calls, beating on the streets, or snatching by "ambiguous individuals while media houses are proceeding cautiously to shield their corporate advantages, media labourers appear to be more worried about their actual security and their families. A definitive casualty is an opportunity for articulation and affiliation, and writer's handiest instrument is to notice self-oversight (Reporters Without Borders).

According to a recent report, in a year's time, Pakistan has dropped down from 145th to 157th out of 180 countries on the Reporters without Borders (2022), World Press Freedom Index. Pakistan is also among the top five dangerous countries, along with Afghanistan, regarding journalists' security and life threat. According to Freedom Network's Annual Press Freedom Report 2020, at least 91 cases, including seven murders of journalists and a blogger, were documented in Pakistan between May 2019 and April 2020. In Pakistan, several media organizations are owned by non-journalistic business entities. These business-minded conglomerates use media as a part of their income-generating businesses, which has risked the dignity of journalism itself (Warrich et al., 2020). This was evident when in 2017, Mir Shakeel-Ur-Rehman, the owner of *Jang/Geo Group*, claimed, "Forget about journalism; this is my business."

The most frequent allegations under which legal cases are registered against journalists include acting against government departments or defaming them. In over one-third (35%) of the legal cases against journalists have bizarre and frivolous allegations – but which carry serious consequences – are slapped against them, including "illegal possession of arms and explosives," "drug running," "keeping banned literature" and even "harassing citizens." In 2022, FIRs were recently registered against the famous journalist Sabir Shakir, Sami Ibrahim, and Arshad Sharif. They were charged with inciting anti-state sentiments in the public (ARY News, 2022). Mati Ullah Jan, a senior Pakistani journalist, was kidnapped from Islamabad and a senior journalist and ex-chairman of Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority (PEMRA), Absar Alam, was shot while jogging in a park (Asian Telegraph).

According to the Freedom Network Report, most journalists (over one-third) are being charged under various provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code; nearly one-third of the journalists who face legal cases are at risk of being charged under the Anti-Terrorism Law, while they are also at risk of being charged under the Electronic Crimes Law and Defamation Law. Due to the continuous threat

and pressure from the government and its institutions, journalists now self-censor the news. According to Articles 19 and 19-A of the Constitution of Pakistan, “every citizen has freedom and right to express himself.” But unfortunately, this has not been implemented to its core. Media has faced dictators’ atrocities, censorship, and journalists were imprisoned and punished during military governments. The democratic governments were supposed to give their right to the media, but in this case, they were not much different from the dictators. They have constantly compelled the media and used it for their interests (Irfan, 2022). Media freedom in Pakistan is declining, and there are several reasons leading to this downfall. Partisanship, also referred to as biasness, is one of the major issues that restrict media freedom in Pakistan. The media outlets are politically polarized, which allows them to support only one perspective while undermining the others. This has also led to fragmentation in audiences because of variations in media channels and the audience’s trust in particular channels. Media organizations promote content that is of interest to the brands which give them advertisements. This shows how media is dependent on its financial source, compromising its freedom. The journalists too trade off their independence with unlawful earnings in the shape of money or gifts (Siraj, 2009). Private media in Pakistan comparatively has the liberty to talk against the government and are free to decide their biases. However, all media is regulated by the government. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) regulates the electronic media of Pakistan, and the Press Council of Pakistan (PCP) regulates the print media. These government bodies restrict media content compromising the media freedom of Pakistan. These restrictions not only work on the media organizations but on the journalists as well, endangering their independence (Reporters without Borders). With the restrictions and censorship on traditional media and the lack of freedom, journalists and news players started to emerge online with digital content. However, the government has taken action on that as well. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) was adopted in 2016, which implicitly aimed to restrict online freedom of expression. The journalists and news editors have unanimously agreed that “a big part of what is killing independent media is censorship with a vengeance” as reported in Dawn in July 2017 “The State of Media Freedom in Pakistan”.

1.1 Problem Statement

The media in Pakistan has been transitioning from traditional to digital; during this time, the overall media system has progressed to a more independent and digital stage. However, the practice of journalistic independence is in decline which ultimately has weakened media freedom and content diversity in Pakistan. Journalistic independence is being compromised with self-regulation and self-censorship at different levels.

1.2 Objective of the Study

- i. To analyze the perception of journalists on media freedom in Pakistan
- ii. To analyze the factors of the decline in media freedom in Pakistan.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What is the perception of journalists on the presence of media freedom in Pakistan?
- ii. What are the factors of the decline in media freedom in Pakistan, according to journalists’ perceptions?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Media Sociology of Pakistan

Looking into the media sociology of Pakistan, the country publishes over 1400 newspapers. These range from countrywide to district-wide editions, as well as morning and evening editions. The most widely read newspapers include *Jang*, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, etc. The popular English newspapers are *Dawn*, *The News*, *Express Tribune* and *Daily Times*, etc. Some newspapers are published in the local language to make it easier for a wider audience to read them; for example, *Khabraan* is a Punjabi language newspaper; *Kaawish*, *Sach*, and *Shaam* are Sindhi language newspapers; and *Qudrat* is a Pashto language newspaper. Other than print media, Pakistan runs a number of electronic media

channels. There are two types of electronic media in Pakistan: state-owned and private. The state-owned channel is *Pakistan Television (PTV)*, while there are numerous private media channels in Pakistan, ranging from national to regional. National television channels include *GEO TV*, *ARY News*, *Dawn News*, *Express News*, *Sama News*, *Waqt News* etc. The larger media groups have also created localised channels which include *Lahore News*, *City 42 Lahore*, and *City 41*, Faisalabad (Jamil, 2023).

“The cross-media ownership concentration in Pakistan is 60% of the accumulative audience shares of the top seven media groups owning media in more than one of four media categories. There are seven cross-media owners in Pakistan’s sample of top 40 media groups with the highest audience shares, including *Jang Group*, *Express Group*, *Government Group*, *Nawa-i-Waqt Group*, *Samaa Group*, *Dawn Group*, and *Dunya Group* – between them they constitute 60% of cross-media audience shares of top 40 media outlets in terms of audience share in the country,” (MoMP, 2019). One of the major cause of homogeneity in content is media concentration that lacks in diversity. As the American Library Association stated, “with a growing concentration of media ownership, independent voices decrease, and locally produced and relevant information, news, and cultural resources diminish.” This restricts the public from having a healthy exchange of information. Critics of media concentration argue that undue concentration negatively impacts diversity in content and leads to potentially anti-competitive practices among significant firms (Albarran and Mierzejewska, 2004). This is because media conglomerates do not let competition grow within the community. Allan and Dimmick (1996) categorized concentration into within-industry concentration and across-industry concentration. Within-industry concentration is more uncomplicated, as it is related to the monopoly of power while cross-industry concentration is relatively challenging. The organizations in a cross-industry concentration aim to control the businesses in cumulative industries. Large media conglomerates that operate in horizontal markets hold considerable market share. The Media Ownership Monitor diagnosed and researched ten indicators to study how concentrated the media market in Pakistan is, horizontally and vertically and the most significant risks to media pluralism. These ten indicators are, media audience concentration; media market concentration; regulatory safeguards: media ownership concentration, cross-media ownership concentration, regulatory safeguards: cross-media ownership concentration; ownership transparency; regulatory safeguards: ownership transparency; control over media outlets and distribution networks; control over media funding; and regulatory safeguards: net neutrality. In this research, *Jang Geo Group* stood top of the list of almost every indicator (Media Ownership Monitor, 2019).

2.2 Media Freedom in the World

As theorized by Schramm, Siebert, and Peterson, there are two types of free press: libertarian media system and socially responsible media system. The libertarian media system is free from any authority or censorship. An outgrowth of the libertarian media system is the socially responsible media which requires the system to adhere to professional standards and codes of conduct when exercising their editorial freedom. Where media freedom exists, journalists and media professionals ought to have full autonomy within the media organizations. There is no explicit connection between the media and governments (Siebert et al., 1984).

Freedom of the press is an extremely important principle in a constitutional democratic system. The concept can be justified solely, by how well it serves the requirements of political democracy. Freedom of the press is displayed by a special range of its right-holders. The blurring of the distinction between newsmakers and news consumers renders this criterion increasingly fragile and unreliable. Deriving all rules regarding the contours and the strength of freedom of the press from the requirements of democracy may seem questionable but is ultimately persuasive: (1) an argument that democracy requires truth so it would support a high degree of censorship can be countered by an appeal to bias and self-interest of decision-makers who would have to police this requirement; (2) the argument that democratically enacted restrictions would have to be accepted if democracy is the ultimate criterion can be countered by an appeal to minimal substantive conditions of democracy, and also to hostility towards democratically enacted restrictions on democratic procedures; (3) the argument that democracy would support only political speech in the press may be countered by appeal to a broad notion of

democracy, but also it may be conceded that there is nothing antithetical to political democracy in allowing non-political speech to be regulated by the majority of the day (Lombardy, 2023).

The regime types are usually linked with media freedoms around the globe. While it is widely believed that media is given its freedom in democratic societies and media is controlled in autocratic societies, researches show that it is not always the same. In some democratic societies, media is state-controlled and in some autocratic societies, media is free (Woodring, 2009). In his book 'Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda,' Noam Chomsky has talked about how states control the media through propaganda tools. He has mentioned the significant achievements made through the development of propaganda. He gave examples of various situations where the United States used propaganda to manufacture public perceptions about an issue and build public opinion according to what the elites require. The elites, or as named in the book, the specialized class, do not want the common people, identified as the bewildered herd, to stand up and think for themselves. They see it as a threat to their hold over the state. Despite forming a democratic state, the common people are marginalized from active participation in government matters (Chomsky, 2002).

Non-journalistic owners of media organizations began to trend in Pakistan when in 2002, ex-President Pervez Musharraf permitted private businesses to enter the electronic media industry. This type of ownership also has political implications, as conglomerates follow partisanship (Wagner & Collins, 2014). Media freedom is highly proportional to political knowledge and participation. Where there is a lack of media freedom, people are less aware of political knowledge and therefore participate less as well (Leeson, 2008). It has been observed that media freedom is contagious. The level of media freedom in a country strongly depends on the levels in its neighboring countries (Sobelet al., 2010).

2.3 Public Confidence in Media

According to a study of public confidence in media during the 2007 Nigerian national elections, the public believed that the media did give sufficient broadcast and publication to the election coverage, however, the public was not found to have enough confidence in the neutrality of the coverage during elections. The Nigerian people were found to have no confidence in the media and its coverage during elections. The ownership by the governing elites does not allow the media to report freely and neutrally (Eshu, 2008). Gallup, in 2021, reported the latest trends of the American public's confidence in their media. According to previous Gallup surveys, the lowest recorded American public trust in media was in 2016. However, it recovered under the Trump administration. Nevertheless, in recent years it was decreasing, and as of 2021, the American public's confidence in their media has fallen to the second-lowest record. The American's confidence in media is not related to the code of ethics but to their evaluation of good journalism (Izard, 1985).

When studying the media coverage during Presidential campaigns in the US, it is seen that as early as 1974, the Republican newspapers gave more coverage to the Republicans, while the independent newspapers gave more coverage to the Democrats (Coffey, 1975). Therefore, this indicates what Shoemaker and Reese (1991) identified in their media ownership theory. They found that media content depends on the interests of the media organization owners. The bias of the news organization can be identified when analysing its coverage of individual events (Greene & Stevenson, 1980). Mantler and Whiteman (1995) pointed that 'when media organizations cover an event, they gather and publish content favouring their organization. This concludes that media concentration and conglomerates largely influence printed and broadcast media content'.

2.4 State Control over Press

Gehlbach and Sonin (2008), in their working paper, suggested that the extent of media freedom completely depends on the organising character of the government and the scope of the advertising market. Media content will be more biased in an autocratic government, whereas lesser in a democratic government. The advertising markets influence media content with technological and economic regulation. The governments do control the media either directly or indirectly. Lawson (2002)

found out that in Mexico, a state organization gave extra benefits to news organizations, in exchange for favourable coverage. In the early 1970s, during Vietnam and the Nixon administration, frequent discussions occurred between news agencies and the government. In 1971, a Supreme Court case entitled *New York Times v. United States* established the significant rights of the press. In this case, the government tried to intimidate the press to refrain from releasing classified documents known as the Pentagon Papers. These papers included classified information about the Vietnam War. The *New York Times* held its ground and fought against government intimidation to prevent publication, and the Supreme Court upheld freedom of the press and its First Amendment (rights to speech). Thus, The *New York Times* released the Pentagon Papers. The freedom of the press has been evaluated repeatedly in the legal systems (Sadurski, 2011).

Kellam and Stein (2016) suggest scholars at a global level have argued that when media is not allowed complete freedom, it cannot carry out its democratic function of providing information to the citizens and monitoring the governments. Several researchers have concluded that when there is adequate media freedom, it brings better governance with less corruption in a country whereas lack of media freedom results in compromised democracy. Researchers have observed that journalists are targeted or threatened to restrict their independence in media (Collings, 2001). There have been several published pieces of research where scholars have argued that populist regimes have prominently restricted media freedom and journalists have been a target of the consequences. Analysing one such populist regime of Prime Minister Imran Khan in Pakistan from 2018 to 2022, Hussain et al. (2022) have observed how journalists have faced pressure and intimidation. The research also found out that the state gave financial and professional benefits to the media organizations that largely supported them while being critical of opposers. If not targeted physically, journalists are trolled on social media which compromises their credibility.

2.5 Targeting Journalists' Freedom

A renowned politician, yet a lesser-known journalist, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto wrote in his column, *My Debut in Journalism, more than in the past, is written both in ink and in blood,* (Pakistan Observer, 1967). He wrote this in relevance to the independence of journalists and freedom of the press. He wrote, "Many would hold that journalism of high calibre cannot exist without the freedom of the press." He explained that the media's function is not to simply record everyday events, but to explore, expose, guide, and evaluate (Nuzhat, 2012). The United Nations recently celebrated World Press Freedom Day 2022. Their theme this year for activities globally was 'Press Freedom: Safety of Journalists and Impunity.' The attacking journalists is a leading threat to freedom of the press. Suppressing journalists is to take away their fundamental right to freedom of expression, which Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has provided to all humans (James, 2022).

In his book *Words of Fire: Independent Journalists Who Challenge Dictators, Drug Lords, and Other Enemies of a Free Press* (2001), Anthony Collings talks about independent journalists and discusses the daily challenges they have to face. Such journalists are found to be unaffected by the powerful elites and care less about them, they are usually the firsts to cover corruption stories in Mexico, crime stories in Russia, sexual scandals in the Middle East, and many more. However, for their refusal to be censored and words of fire, they are bound to face the brunt of their antagonist's wrath. Being a journalist himself, Collings has been behind the bars for some similar reasons. In this book, he focuses neither on countries with free press, nor countries with controlled press, but he deliberates on the situation of media and journalists in countries that are, as he refers to "battleground countries," where there is a constant race between media and the state. In August 2022, a renowned investigative journalist of Pakistan, Arshad Sharif, escaped the country on alleged threats to his life. Expecting support from media associations, he informed and requested security against the threats. However, in October 2022, he was shot dead in Kenya. As reported in *The Express Tribune*, "The untimely death of the journalist sent shock waves across rights organisations, the media fraternity and civil society and prompted calls for thorough investigation and disclosure of facts," (October 24, 2022).

2.6 Online Media as a New Platform of Expression

Since traditional media and journalists have been facing lack of freedom of expression, this has given birth to online news platforms and citizen journalism. People have now got more options for having news and other required information, at a comparatively cheaper cost (Raza, et. al., 2022). Citizen journalism is when the public plays an active role in collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating information. People broadcast news and information on their blogs and websites which can be accessible to all. This limits the possibility of content being targeted by censorship and complete information about an event reaches the public (Badran, 2017). In their study, Scherer, Naab, and Starke (2016) observed the impact of media freedom on corruption in over 157 countries, including Pakistan. They found out that online media freedom has significantly reduced corruption at country levels. This is majorly because of citizen journalism. Poelle and van Dijck suggested in their research *Social Media and Journalistic Independence* (2014), online media platforms have facilitated and enhanced the democratic functions of journalists. Scholars have considered online platforms to be potential saviours of new media professionals. The journalists have easy access to new news sources, audience, and also track the interests of the public (Bruns, 2008; Flew, 2009; Gillmor, 2004; Hermida, 2011; Paulussen et al., 2007; Rosen, 2006). By analysing user interests through social media metrics, journalists tend to publish content that will get not only more reach but more metrics as well. However, they also concluded in their research that for true journalistic independence, journalists do not need to be free of commercial and political sources, but also from the influence of online platforms and the users (Poelle and van Dijck, 2014).

The content on online platforms does not have any limit on access, which means that any person at any time can get access to any content shared. However, this easy access is not considered good for all. As Professor Cass Sunstein has argued in his book *Republic.com*, "While the internet may help make expression less expensive and unmediated, it allows users to select the information that conforms to their pre-existing views and to exclude opposing arguments through filtering technology." By this, he meant that due to online easy access to content by choice, an individual can now stay restricted to their own point of view and neglect others (Sunstein, 2001). Due to the use of online platforms for news spread, it has become difficult to interpret which news is real or fake, knowing the fact that propaganda exists at a larger scale where there is no check and balance on the content. This is mainly because it is difficult to verify the source of news and its validity (Kohle, et. al., 2015).

According to the World Press Freedom Index 2022, the evolution of unregulated online information platforms is causing nothing but a disastrous effect on the news and information chaos. Online media has increased the risk of fake news and propaganda. There is usually no check-and-balance on the news being shared on social platforms. People may or may not have authentic information, or they might even spread false information to sell some propaganda. It has become nearly impossible to distinguish between real user-generated content and propaganda content on social media. It has been observed that with the emergence of online media platforms for sharing and spreading of media content, the dominance of journalists and news organizations in this field has been not just challenged but also compromised. To cope with world trends, news organizations are reaching more online platforms and journalists are being required to actively engage with their audience (Gade & Raviola, 2009). In a survey conducted by Reuters Institute teamed with the Society of Professional Journalists in 2015, the journalists agreed that with the fast-growing world and changing trends, journalism will become a harder and more stressful profession. Journalists believe, to stay in the flow of rapidly updating trends, they have to begin personal branding for social media and the users (Picard, 2015)

2.7 Theoretical Framework

In this research, the researcher has applied one model and one theory. The model is the Hierarchy of Influences Model by Shoemaker and Reese, presented in 1996, which identifies the 5 levels of influences on media content. The theory applied in this research is the Media Ownership Theory, also given by Shoemaker and Reese in 1991. This theory states that the biasness of media content immensely depends on the varying ownership of media.

2.7.1 Hierarchy of Influences Model

This research is conducted using the Hierarchy of Influences Model by Shoemaker and Reese (1996). This model was introduced in the book 'Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content,' by Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese. In this model, Shoemaker and Reese identified five levels of influence, ranging from macro to micro levels, through which media content is affected. These five influences are explained below:

- 1. Influence of Social Systems:** According to Shoemaker and Reese, the influence of social systems is how ideological forces shape media content. Ideology, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is a set of concepts or beliefs about human life or culture. There are several ideologies existing in today's world; fundamentalism, capitalism, totalitarianism, socialism, globalism, liberalism, and colonialism are all widely believed and followed ideologies, just to name a few. Every ideology has a varying influence. The ideologies existing in today's social system influence media content. It is often considered a sin, if a journalist even plans to or research content against an ideology of the locality, they may be in.
- 2. Influence of Social Institutions:** The media content is largely influenced by the source who provides the news. Very often does the journalist get news from some source, whether another journalist, a detective or simply a public person. Every news story may have been angled in a way that the source believes it to be. Therefore, the journalist will present it the same way as brought by their source. Error often occurs when the source hides some information or lies about something, costing the journalist and media organization their credibility.
- 3. Influence of Media Organizations:** Media organizations also have an influence on the content because of their organizational policy and occupational roles. The economic imperatives of organizations also influence media content. At this level, it is significant to put light on the analysis presented by Breed (1955) which focuses on how social control within the newsroom influences the media content. This analysis shows how diverse parts of an organization work together in sustaining its goals. Media content is also influenced by how a media enterprise is structured. The media organization owners have a great influence on the content being broadcasted to the public. They control or exaggerate any report according to their interests.
- 4. Influence of Routine Practices:** Routine practices are the ones that journalists or media organizations follow monotonously. For example, there is a routine practice within media, to highlight issues from prominent personalities or localities, whereas lowlighting the issues of lesser-known areas. There are three main sources of routine practices that effect media content are audiences, media organizations, and content suppliers. Journalists and media organizations have certain set norms to respond to common situations. Gatekeeping is also a routine practice that influences media content. It is a process by which media content is filtered before being broadcasted. In Pakistan, there is PEMRA which controls electronic media content, and PCP which control print media content. For online content surveillance, the PECA ordinance and Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) are assigned the tasks.
- 5. Influence of Individuals:** At the core of the model is the individual influence that journalists have on their content. Journalists, at their personal level, have their own interests or fears that effect their content. As discussed in this research before, several journalists are targeted for harassment or threats. Their fear of these threats does not allow them to share complete content but filtered ones. The rise of opinionated journalism influences media content. It is believed that as a journalist, one always has biases because it is human nature to choose one out of the two opposing parties. Therefore, when a journalist adds his or her own opinion while reporting an issue, their tone is obvious in one's support and against another.

2.7.2 Media Institutionalization Theory

The second theory that shall be applied to the subject research is the Institutional Theory by John Meyer and Brian Rowen in the late 1970s. They introduced this theory as a means to explore the

relationship between organizations and society. The theory helps understand the structure of an organization and what norms and rules they follow to legitimize themselves and survive in society. The theory suggests that routines, norms, and rules generally become an authoritative guideline for any institution with time (Institutional Theory: Environment & Social Structure, 2017). According to Scott (2008), the key insight of institutional theory is that rather than adjusting their practices, organizations tend to look to fellow organizations for appropriate rules. Scott (1995) also highlights that in order to survive in a society, organizations are bound to conform to the prevailing rules of society. There are certain standard routines in the Pakistani media organization, which are the reasons why Pakistani media has started to decline in its efficiency. Scholars have listed various issues that the media in Pakistan faces. For example, there is a standard routine in media organizations, where journalists tend to be politically polarized. One perspective is supported and promoted, while the opposing perspectives are undermined. Sensationalism has become another set standard for media organizations to follow. Another routine practice of Pakistani media is to be more focussed on event-based reporting. Journalists generally wait for an event to occur, and then report on it. The routine practice of politics-oriented media has caused limited-to-no diversity in media content, as every issue is reported through the perspective of politics.

One of the most disastrous set routines, that has become a standard guideline for media in Pakistan, is its elitist nature. Elitist in terms of people, as well as places. For example, Islamabad, being the Federal Capital of the state, is notoriously over-reported. While the outskirts of the metropolitan city, for example, Rawat, only gets coverage of major crimes. The elite cities get all kinds of coverage reporting, while small towns are comparatively less reported. This and many such routine practices that have become standard guidelines, cause a decline in media freedom in Pakistan.

2.8 Applying the Theory

| Theoretical Statement | Variable | Research Question |
|---|---|--|
| Media content is affected by the influence of social systems | Ideology, Source | Perception of journalists on media freedom in Pakistan |
| Routines and norms become authoritative guidelines for a media institution | Over-reporting, advertisements, Funders | Factors of the decline in media freedom in Pakistan |
| Media content is affected by the influence of social institutions Media content is affected by the influence of media organizations Individual characteristics of journalists influence the media content | Editorial policy, Media Content politics-oriented | Perception of journalists on how the media content is influenced |
| Journalists following routine practices affect the media content | Self-censorship, Autonomy, urban-based news | Perception of journalists on how independent they are in covering the news |

3. Methodology

The design of this research study is survey methodology. As the aim of this research was to take the perspective of journalists, therefore, a questionnaire was made and circulated among journalists

and senior media professionals. The journalists were humbly requested to fill in the questionnaire based on Media Freedom in Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used for this study as the survey was created online on Google Forms. The link was sent to respondents through email and WhatsApp. However, some questionnaires were printed and distributed among newsrooms of different channels. The population sample for this study is journalists from Lahore, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi. The purpose behind selecting a sample from these areas is the researcher's convenience. The total number of respondents who are a part of a study is its sample size. The sample size taken for this study is 120 journalists and senior media professionals. The sampling technique is the particular process by which the individuals of the sample have been chosen. To get practical conclusions from the findings, a researcher has to decide how they will pick a sample that represents the population as a whole (McCombs, 2019).

The questionnaire designed for this research included questions for demographic information, the level of media freedom in Pakistan, lack of journalistic independence, and influences over media content. The questionnaire was a close-ended one to avoid some irrelevant responses. The asked questions offer the respondent the capability to air their opinions on a specific subject matter mentioned in the questionnaire. However, filling in their name and media group was not obligatory, keeping in view their confidentiality. For the same reason, they have not been reflected in the results shown in the next chapter. The section on the level of media freedom in Pakistan included questions like "How strongly do you agree that journalists talk less about the accountability of media", "How greatly do you see the freedom of the press in Pakistan", "How do you see the government control in the overall business of media" and "Do you agree that ethnicity and diverse culture is a hurdle in the freedom of the press?"

Lack of journalistic independence was analysed using the questions like "How frequently do you involve in self-censorship", "How frequently do you experience pressures from political and religious groups on media freedom", "How often do media associations support journalists at the time of internal and external pressures on them" and "Who defines the editorial policy of your media outlet?" The last section was made keeping in view the Hierarchy of Influences Model by Shoemaker and Reese (1991) and the Institutional Theory by Meyer and Rowan (1970s). The following questions examined the influence over media content: "How strongly do you see the influence of ideological forces on shaping media content", "How strongly do you agree that the routine journalistic practices influence media freedom", "How often do advertisers and other influential segments of society control the content", "How often do you see the influence of cross-media ownership on content diversity" and "How frequently do you face owner's direct influence on editorial policies?" The sample taken for this research was 120 journalists and senior media professionals, who were asked 14 questions. The reliability of this sample is explained in the table below:

Table 1. Reliability of the sample

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | No of Items |
| 0.843 | 14 |

The table above suggests the reliability coefficients (alpha) turned into 0.843 for the journalists' sample which strongly meets the desirable degree of 0.7 or higher.

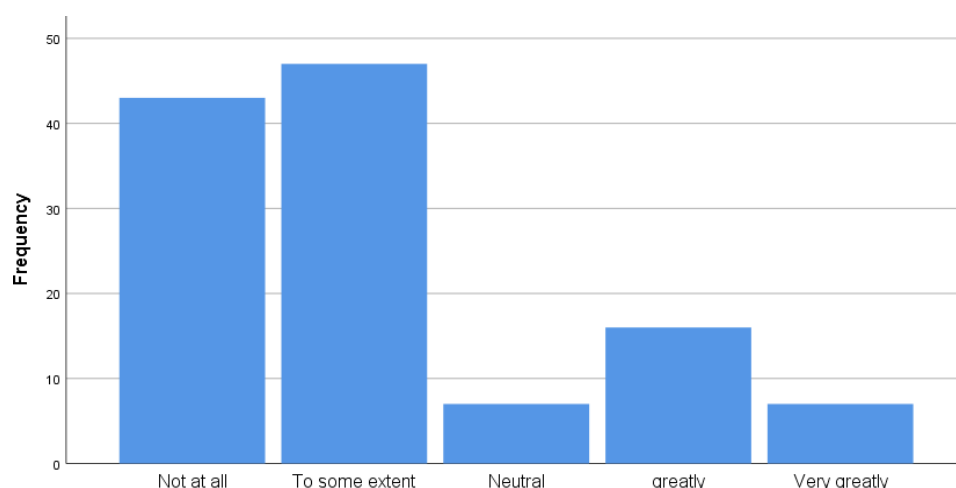
4. Findings and Analysis

Table 2. Types of Media

| | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Print Media | 61 | 50.8 |
| Electronic Media | 36 | 30.0 |

| | | |
|--------------|-----|-------|
| Online Media | 23 | 19.2 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

The table above shows that the majority 51% of journalists represent print media, 30% from electronic media, and while 19% belong to online media.



Graph 1. Freedom of Press

According to the graph of responses collected, more than 50% of journalists have a perspective that freedom of the press does not exist in Pakistan. However, only about 8% believe there is freedom of the press in Pakistan.

Table 3. Accountability of the Media

| | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Strongly Disagree | 11 | 9.2 |
| Disagree | 27 | 22.5 |
| Neutral | 9 | 7.5 |
| Agree | 37 | 30.8 |
| Strongly Agree | 36 | 30.0 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

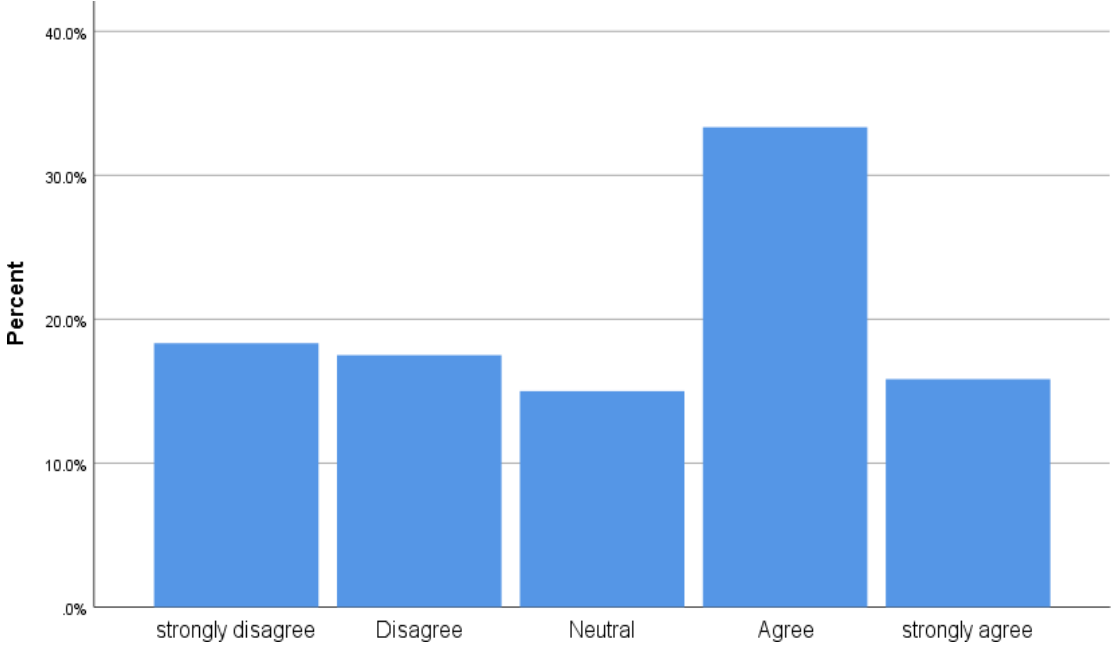
According to the table above, out of 120 respondents, a majority agreed about journalists talking less about the accountability of media and only 31% disagreed.

Table 4. Government Control over Media

| | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| Not At All | 24 | 20.0 |
| To Some Extent | 21 | 17.5 |
| Neutral | 11 | 9.2 |
| | 57 | |

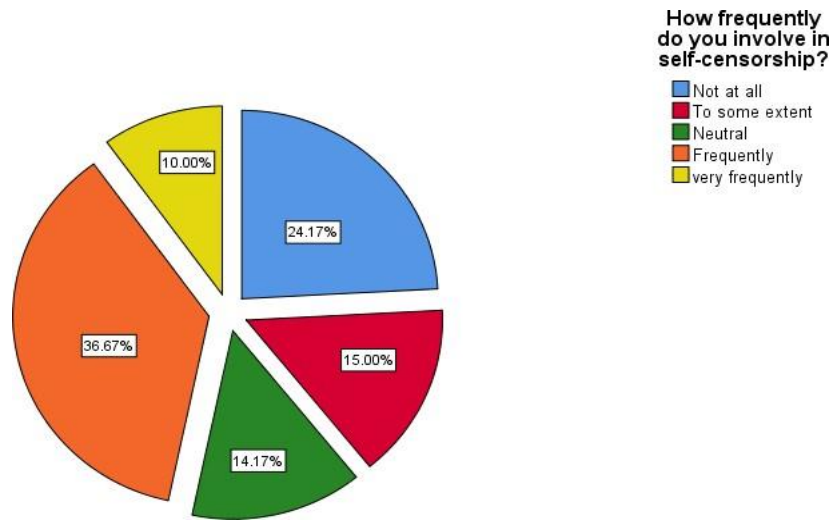
| | | |
|--------------|-----|-------|
| Greatly | 42 | 35.0 |
| Very Greatly | 22 | 18.3 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

The table suggests that 53% of journalists agreed about the government controlling the mediabusiness. Whereas only 20% of them completely denied state control over media.



Graph 2. Hurdles in the Freedom of Media

The above graph 2. proposes that nearly 50% of the journalists agreed that ethnicity and diverse cultures are a hurdle to the freedom of the press. About 40% disagreed with this question.



Graph 3. About Self-Censorship

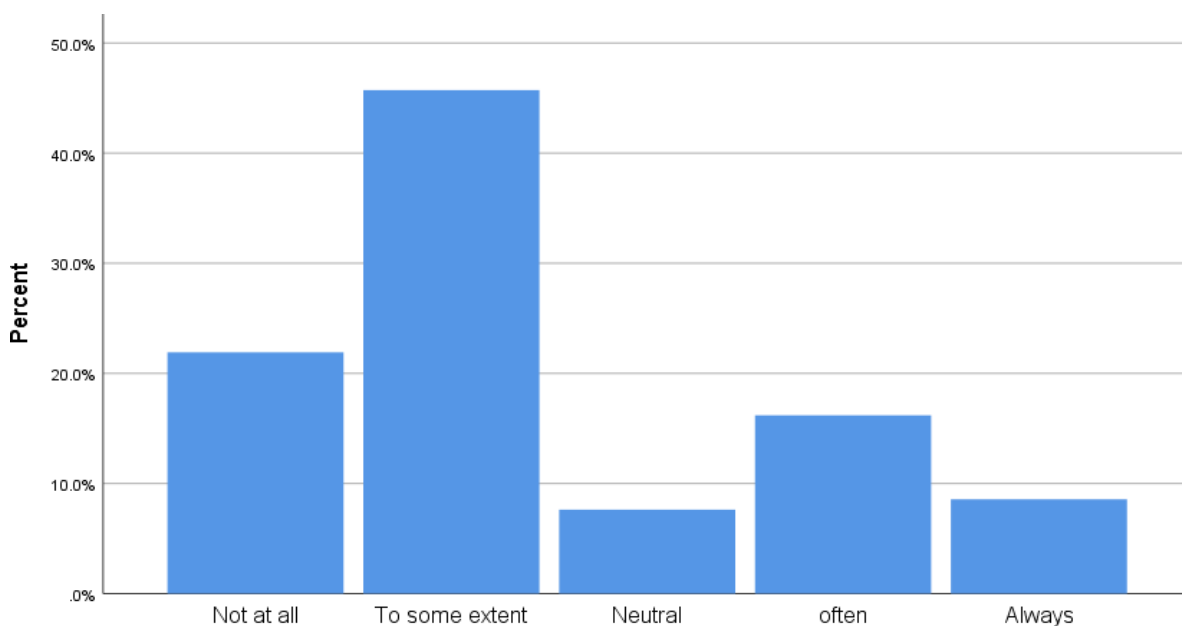
The pie chart above demonstrates that 46.67% of journalists agreed to be involved in self-censorship, but 39.17% disagreed with involving themselves in self-censorship.

Table 5. Self-Censorship and Pressures on Media Freedom

| | | Self-Censorship | Pressures on Media Freedom |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| self-censorship? | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .716** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| Pressures from political and religious groups on media freedom? | N | 120 | 120 |
| | Pearson Correlation | .716** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 120 | 120 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 indicates a significant correlation $\leq .72$ between self-censorship and pressures from political and religious groups on media freedom has been observed.



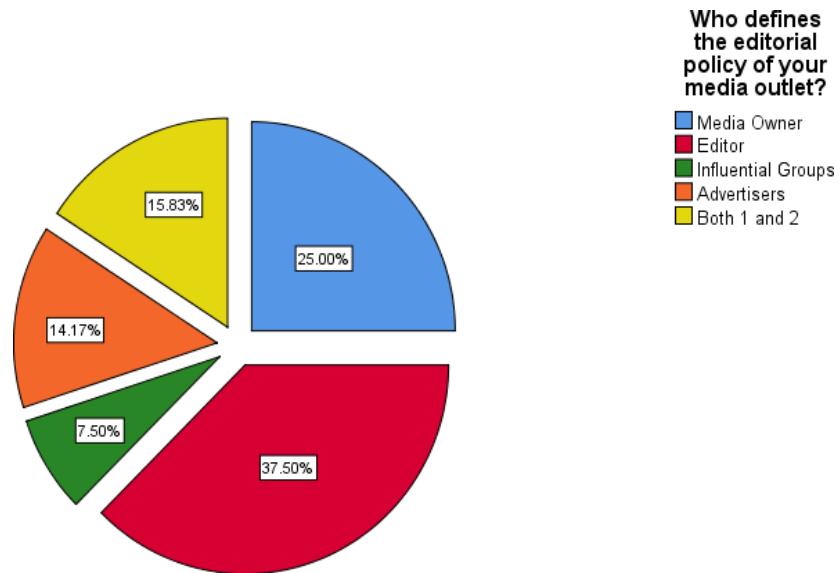
Graph 4. Independence of Journalists

The graph above proves that only about 30% of the journalists agreed to have independence in voicing their opinion, even if it differs from that of their organization. However, more than 50% of journalists disagreed with having such independence.

Table 6. Media Associations To Counter Internal and External Pressures

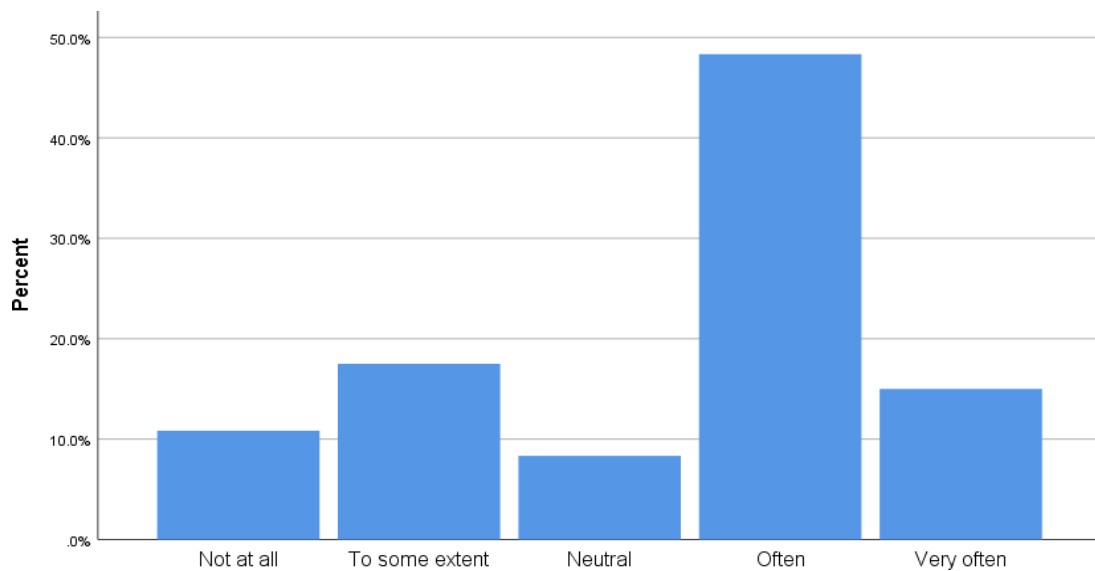
| | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| Not At All | 27 | 22.5 |
| To Some Extent | 45 | 37.5 |
| Neutral | 18 | 15.0 |
| Greatly | 17 | 14.2 |
| Very Greatly | 13 | 10.8 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

The journalists were questioned if they get media associations’ support when facing internal and external pressures. 60% of journalists denied getting any support, while only 16.6% of them agreed to have support from media associations.



Graph 5. Editorial Policy Decisions

When questioned about the editorial policy of the media outlet, 37.5% of journalists said the editors define them, 25% held media owners responsible, and 15% used the option of both the media owner and the editor. Only about 21% of journalists alleged influential groups and advertisers defining their editorial policy.



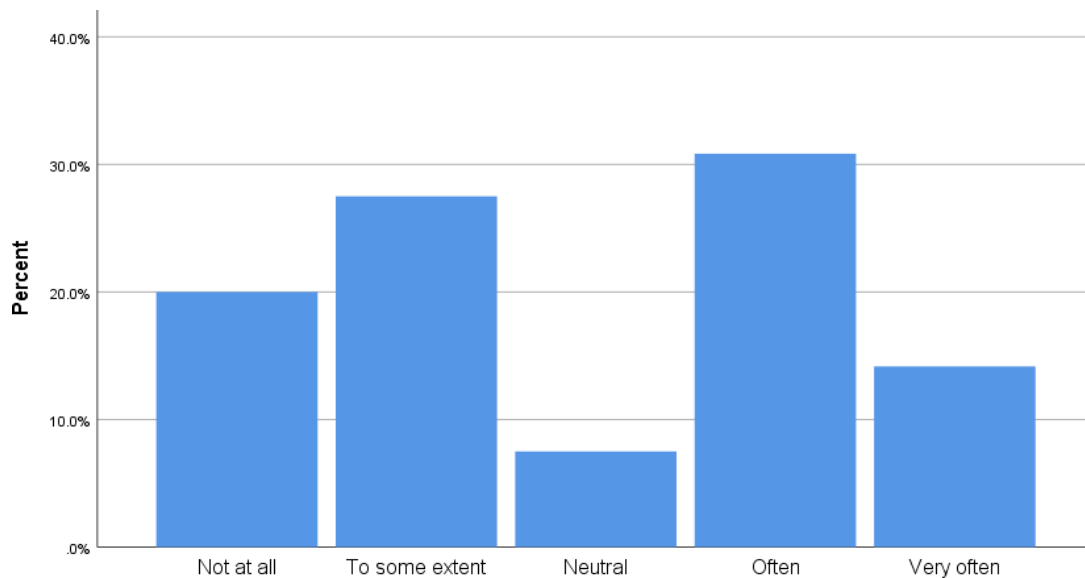
Graph 6. Influence of Ideological Forces on Shaping of Media Content

As visible in the graph above, about 50% of journalists agreed that ideological forces often do shape the media content. While on the other hand, only about 10% disagreed about the influence of these forces.

Table 7. Influence of Routine Journalistic Practices

| | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Strongly Disagree | 24 | 20.0 |
| Disagree | 23 | 19.2 |
| Neutral | 16 | 13.3 |
| Agree | 47 | 39.2 |
| Strongly Agree | 10 | 8.3 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

The table suggests that 39.2% of 120 journalists disagreed about routine journalistic practices influencing media freedom. Whereas 47.5% of them agreed on these practices influencing the freedom of the press.



Graph 7. Influence of Cross-media Ownership on Content Diversity

This graph shows that about half the journalists agreed about the influence of cross-media ownership on content diversity, and the rest half disagreed. Less than 10% of journalists remained neutral in their stance.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was designed to investigate the state of press freedom from a journalist's perspective in Pakistan. The study has addressed the issues related to the independence of journalists, content sociology, regulatory restrictions, factors related to the declining freedom of media, and the internal and external pressures on the overall business of media from the journalists' perspective. The Hierarchy of Influences Model was the theoretical framework. Further, the Ownership Theory has also been utilized. For this purpose, a sample of 120 journalists belonging to print media, electronic media, and social media were surveyed to get their opinion on the subject. In the sample of this study, 51% of journalists represent print media, 30% are from electronic media, and while 19% belong to online media (Table 2). On the question of freedom of the press in Pakistan, the majority 50% journalists have the opinion that freedom of the press does not exist in Pakistan. However, only about 8% believe there is freedom of the press in Pakistan. The journalists are the more related and concerned people who can see and closely observe the journalism and media system (Graph 1). When asked regarding the accountability of the media, the majority 61% respondents were of the view that journalists are not likely to discuss accountability of the media while 32% disagreed. The culture of democracy within the media outlets like editorial boards and decision-making bodies is rare and most of the time the media owners do not like and promote the culture of accountability within the media houses (Table 2). There are so many big media houses that do not have any background in journalism and media.

Where the Constitution of Pakistan gives complete freedom of expression to the public, including media, the state has established certain authorities, like Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to act as a watchdog over the content being published or aired by any media organization. If any content goes on-air or is published against the state policies, the media organization is either fined, or their airing is suspended. When journalists were asked whether they believe that government has control over the media business, around 53% of the journalists agreed, whereas only 20% disagreed (Table 3). There is a significant correlation of $\leq .72$ that has been observed between self-censorship and pressures on freedom of the press. This means that journalists take pressure from religious and political quarters in the matters of freedom of the press and they censor keeping in view the political and religious influences and forced ideologies (Table 4).

The Hierarchy of Influences Model by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) also shows that an individual has an influence over media content. The individual who belongs to a diverse culture and ethnicity influences what content they share on media. When journalists were asked about what they think of ethnicity and diverse culture as a hurdle in freedom of the press, nearly 50% of journalists agreed with the fact and about 40% disagreed (Graph 1). Self-censoring refers to journalists themselves controlling the content they share. They are aware of the content that will bring a threat to them, so they decide to keep that information to themselves. When questioned, 46.67% of the journalists agreed to be involved in self-censorship, but 39.17% disagreed with involving themselves in self-censorship (Graph 2).

Political controversies are reflected in media, affecting media freedom and content diversity. There have been several shreds of evidence of this like in August 2022, *ARY News* was suspended from broadcasting on sedition charges and senior professionals from the organization were also arrested. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (*PFUJ*) condemned this action (International Federation of Journalists, 2022, August 10). The transmission was reinstated early in September, after immediate restoration orders by Islamabad High Court (IHC). Following this, in mid-September 2022, *ARY News* and *BOL News* were suspended transmission for three days by PEMRA, as they were alleged of supporting the opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and criticising the government of Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N). However, they were allowed on-airing with orders of not live telecasting the speech by Imran Khan, Chairman PTI (Pakistan Today, 2022, September 15). Corresponding on the state policy, PEMRA also blocked YouTube during the times Imran Khan was giving a live speech, whether in a rally or on media. On the question of journalists facing pressure

from political and religious groups, 53% of them agreed, while 18.3% completely rejected any such pressure (Table 5).

The journalists who are associated with a media organization, are often given guidelines on what content to broadcast and what to lowlight. Journalists' opinions are dependent on the policy of their media organization. When these journalists were questioned, only about 30% of them agreed to have independence in voicing their opinion, even if it differs from that of their organization. However, more than 50% of journalists disagreed with having such independence (Graph 4). Journalists face several kinds of internal and external pressures. There are many media associations formed to mediate any issue arising related to media and journalists. These associations are often thought to support journalists when they face any such pressure. But on the other hand, media associations themselves also face internal as well as external pressures, which is why they usually are unable to give full support to their journalists. However, when these journalists were questioned whether they get any support from media associations, 60% of journalists denied getting any support, while only 16.6% of them agreed to have support from media associations (Table 6).

Media outlets have defined editorial policy which serves as a guideline for the media workers on what kind of media content to highlight and what to lowlight. It also suggests how to present content. Editorial policies are defined either by the editor-in-chief, or the media owners. However, certain editorial policies are greatly influenced by influential groups and advertisers. When questioned about the editorial policy of the media outlet, 37.5% of journalists said the editors define them, 25% held media owners responsible, and 15% used the option of both the media owner and the editor. Only about 21% of journalists alleged influential groups and advertisers of defining their editorial policy (Graph 5).

The Hierarchy of Influences Model by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) also suggests that the most macro-level of influence over media content is that of ideological forces. Ideology is a set of beliefs about culture. Every locality has a different set of ideologies in its culture. When journalists research content that is against the ideology of a certain culture, they are often considered sinners. When asked, about 50% of journalists agreed that ideological forces often do shape the media content. While on the other hand, only about 10% disagreed on the influence of these forces (Graph 6).

As suggested by the Institutional Theory by Meyer and Rowan (1970s), organizations follow certain routine practices which gradually become an authoritative guideline for them. Journalists also follow some routine practices, which include highlighting or lowlighting an issue based on prominence, or in Pakistan, for example, journalists hype content related to Islam. These routine practices generally shape the content broadcasted on media. The journalists were asked whether they believe in routine practices influencing media freedom. Around 39% of the journalists disagreed, but more than 45% agreed with the question (Table 7). Cross-media ownership refers to one media organization running various types of media, including print and electronic. When one organization heads more than one type of media, they usually share similar content on each because of their editorial policies. When the journalists were asked if they believe cross-media ownership has an influence on content diversity, half of them agreed, and half disagreed (Graph 7).

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