Analysing How Pakistani Journalists Navigate Threats Towards Their Press Freedom

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Abstract

Pakistan remains one of the world's most challenging environments for journalists. While national media have at times criticized governments and even helped unseat military rulers, individual reporters continue to face intimidation, censorship, and the constant risk of violence. This study investigates how journalists working in Pakistan sustain their professional practice under such pressure and what their strategies reveal about the realities of press freedom. Adopting an inductive qualitative design, the research draws on extensive, in-depth interviews with reporters from mainstream print and TV media channels across Pakistan. Participants represented a range of political orientations and career stages, allowing exploration of diverse experiences and coping mechanisms. Analysis shows that journalists often respond to political and military threats through pragmatic conformity: selectively avoiding certain topics, softening language, or framing stories to align with powerful interests while still attempting to inform the public. The findings demonstrate that Pakistani journalists are not merely passive victims but active navigators of a tightly constrained media landscape. Their strategies illustrate how professional integrity can coexist with calculated compliance, revealing a form of everyday journalistic courage shaped by necessity rather than overt defiance. The study concludes that understanding press freedom requires attention not only to external restrictions but also to the adaptive practices journalists adopt to survive. These insights contribute to global debates on media independence, inform policies aimed at safeguarding journalists, and highlight the complex relationship between power, risk, and professional ethics in politically repressive contexts.

Keywords: Threats, agency, navigating, establishment, Pakistani journalism.

1. Introduction

The landscape for political journalism in Pakistan faces many challenges, including violence fueled by ongoing clashes among factions with competing political or religious agendas (Amnesty International, 2021).To make matters worse, the establishment of the country is notorious for threatening, attacking, and controlling the journalists. There are also threats posed by political groups like Tehreek-i-Taliban and Tehreek-i-Labbaik (Amnesty International, 2021).

Furthermore, Pakistani journalists are normally not trained and paid enough despite the dangers they deal with, and this compels them to compromise their integrity and engagement in fraudulent activities (Arshad & Ashraf, 2014).

This research seeks to understand the pressures confronting Pakistani journalists that lead them to limit and restrain their coverage, while also exploring how they work around these obstacles.

1.1 Research Question

RQ. How do individual journalists in Pakistan experience and navigate the meso-level and macro-level structural barriers to their press freedom?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Understanding Media Censorship

Echoing Simon Lee's notion that freedom of speech can come at the cost of lives and even compromise those close to us (Lee, 1990, p. 9), the Pakistani context is no exception. Journalists working within Pakistan cannot openly cover all the topics and issues that they desire due to several threats involved. Therefore, most journalists opt to adhere by the guidelines, censorships, and self-censorship in order to survive and operate within the system.

Horton (2011) noted that self-censorship is a complex, pervasive practice shaped by multiple social influences and roles. He clarified that many people including friends, parents, teachers and even colleagues of journalists can compel them to self-censor. Cook and Heilmann (2013) distinguish between two primary forms of self-censorship practiced by journalists: public and private. The private form involves holding back personal views when no outside pressure is present, while the public form describes a set of individual reactions to overt, collective controls. Building on Cook and Heilmann's (2013) discussion, Skjerdal (2010) describes the practice as journalists deliberately omitting potentially important material when they sense intimidation from powerful actors. He highlights the role of external forces such as state interference, prevailing cultural expectations, and internal newsroom routines as key drivers of this restraint. Donsbach (2004) further shed light on the organizational aims. He emphasized that the institutional pressures induce journalists to focus on particular subjects and to employ eye-catching formats like pictures to grab viewer's attention. He further emphasized organizational motivations, noting that journalists may shape or withhold content to align with the newsroom's political stance or ideological goals. Speaking further about external dangers, Horton (2011) said that in addition to governments, organizations like churches, commercial businesses, and colleges also exert self-censorship pressure on journalists. He went on to say that understanding the motivation behind self-censorship is crucial because it cannot be accounted for as self-censorship if a journalist chooses to censor their work out of a potential fear of violence, imprisonment, or other negative outcomes. Therefore, he concluded that self-censorship is only pertinent when you have a choice without fearing any harm to withdraw information. Bar-Tal (2017), on the other hand, views self-censorship negatively and characterizes it as a scourge that hinders the world from improving by robbing its actors of their integrity. He talked about how certain information that has the potential to greatly benefit communities is frequently withheld, with consequences for society as a whole. Thus, Bar-Tal (2017) frames self-censorship as a deliberate practice of withholding information voluntarily, even when no formal restrictions exist, thereby presenting an obstacle to the effective functioning of a democratic society. This brings up the normative issue of whether and under what circumstances self-censorship is genuinely justifiable. Addressing this, Skjerdal (2010) argued that in certain contexts, including Somalia and parts of Africa, practicing self-censorship is often the sole viable approach for journalists, as it is essential for their personal safety and continued professional activity. He further challenged the argument of Bar-Tal (2018), noting that even internationally recognized foreign correspondents acknowledge employing self-censorship while reporting in African contexts, as it is often the only feasible strategy for staying safe. Likewise, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) highlighted that both biological and cultural factors can strongly influence a journalist's choice of stories, making it essential to consider these elements in the news selection process. Additionally, Donsbach (2004) emphasized the significance of understanding the psychological factors that influence journalists' decisions regarding the news and proposed that the "need for social validation of perceptions" and the "need to preserve one's existing predispositions" are two

fundamental functions that may help to explain such news decisions. Whereas maintaining existing personal biases reflects journalists' cognitive tendencies, the drive for social approval is primarily shaped by social expectations and norms. Thus, the major types of threats that influence journalists are external, organizational, and psychological. This study has categorized such threats at the macro, meso and micro level. Macro level threats include the intimidations that the respondents face outside their proximate circle of social environment. These threats involve, the political atmosphere, religious pressure, military forces, economic pressures, socio-cultural hurdles, and the legislation of the country. As for the meso-level threats, it involves journalist's most contiguous social environment, ranging from their friends, colleagues, family to the pressure they feel from their organization and sources. Likewise, micro-level threats involve the personal aspirations, financial restraints, and fear of safety for the journalists.

Regarding these threats, Sarwar (2011) elaborated how journalists in Pakistan navigate their way while 'dealing with the devil' as she called it. She explained that Pakistan has a bureaucratic culture where press freedom is a fledging concept and even the most harmless government files are classified as top secrets. Thus, in order to gain access to such files and publish their stories on the front pages, journalists have to find reliable sources that have access to such classified secrets. In return, journalists often have to provide favours to such sources by publishing a story against someone for them. Thus, these journalists often have to indulge in wrongdoings for merely extracting useful information against the government. Furthermore, Sarwar (2011) mentioned that Pakistani journalists manage to avoid their biggest threats by ignoring to write anything against the army and Islam. She argued that it is imperative for journalists to keep up with the narrative that India is the enemy, and Pakistan is the torch bearer of Islam. Thus, as long as journalists continue to glorify the army and never challenge Islam, they can avoid the major threats. Adding to that, Aslam (2015) further illustrated that it is not unrealistic to understand why many journalists in Pakistan would choose their own safety over public interest by digressing from their professional commitments. She further discussed that journalists also have to abide by the organizational and societal limitations in order to keep their job and tackle their financial difficulties.

Some of the models that analyses and entails such kind of threats are discussed below. Reese (2001) introduced the hierarchy of influence, a concept that examines how news decisions are shaped across multiple levels from individual journalists and organizational structures to news routines, extra media forces, and broader ideological contexts. This model is extremely apt for the analysis of this study since it adequately covers all aspects of external, organizational, and intrinsic barriers that affect content creation. The same goes for Zhong and John's (2009) model of news decision making, which is based on two distinct structures: a hierarchical system of news elements and the association network of news decisions. Three levels make up the hierarchy, with level 1 being the lowest and containing news components for the cognitive system. Level 2 relates to aspects of news within the cultural system, while Level 3 focuses on news elements connected to the rational system, reflecting how journalists perceive society. In the associative network model, the three dimensions are not strictly hierarchical, although decisions at the cognitive level can influence those at the cultural or rational levels (Zhong & John, 2009). Likewise, Giddens (1984) in his structuration theory emphasized on the relationship between individuals and society while refuting dualistic views that see social experiences as resulted by either human agents or social structures. Giddens (1984) suggests that agency and structure are a conjointly integral dualism. Hence, social phenomena are not a consequence of either agency or structure but is a product caused by both. Neither human agency, nor social structure are independent of each other but in fact human agents draw on social structures in their actions and simultaneously these actions function to produce and reproduce social structure (Jones & Karsten, 2008).

3. Methodology

This research highlights the suppressed voices of journalists who have had to compromise their freedom of expression due to the growing threats surrounding journalism in Pakistan. The purpose of this study was to provide a space for these journalists to articulate their lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of danger in the performance of their professional duties. Following Creswell's argument that qualitative inquiry is suitable when the objective is to privilege participants' perspectives, amplify their voices, and minimize the power imbalance between researcher and participants, this study adopts a qualitative design (Creswell, 1998).

In-depth interviews were selected as the principal research method, as they allowed for rich, nuanced, and contextually grounded accounts of journalists' experiences. This method has been widely applied in previous literature exploring threats to media freedom (Amnesty International, 2014; Aslam, 2015; CIMA, 2012). Semi-structured interviews encouraged open expression while maintaining consistency across central themes, enabling participants to reflect on complex professional and personal realities often underrepresented in scholarly and policy discourse.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that only journalists with direct and relevant experiences were included. This sampling approach was deemed most appropriate for an exploratory study seeking information-rich cases rather than generalizable data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The inclusion criteria required participants to have substantial experience in their respective journalistic career, to have personally faced threats to their professional freedom, and to be willing to speak candidly about sensitive topics. Journalists who had no firsthand experience with threats or were unwilling to discuss them were excluded. Efforts were made to include participants across multiple media sectors, including television and print outlets, as well as both privately owned and state-owned organizations. Considering that Pakistan has only one state-owned news channel, one respondent represented that organization, while others were employed by private outlets, providing a well-rounded cross-section of the journalistic field.

In total, seven mainstream journalists were interviewed. Six of them had over fifteen years of professional experience, and all participants had encountered direct or indirect threats. Several had survived incidents of physical intimidation or assault in the line of duty.

Data collection took place over two months while the researcher was affiliated with the University of Amsterdam. The process was carried out in accordance with the university's ethical guidelines and with the awareness and approval of the supervising academic authority.

Due to security and logistical constraints that made in-person interviews in Pakistan impractical, all interviews were conducted remotely through WhatsApp voice calls, which are protected by end-to-end encryption to ensure privacy and data security. Each interview lasted between 45 and 85 minutes, with most averaging just over an hour. Participants were briefed in advance about the purpose of the study, the use of data, and their rights as participants, including the option to withdraw at any point without providing a reason.

Ethical integrity was a cornerstone of this study, particularly given the sensitivity of the subject and the risks faced by participants. Ethical approval was obtained under the guidance of the University of Amsterdam's research ethics framework. Before each interview, verbal informed consent was secured from participants for both their participation and audio recording. The researcher explained the aims of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were assured that no identifying details, such as their names, workplaces, or any recognizable biographical information, would appear in the research.

Anonymity was maintained through the use of pseudonyms such as R1, R2, and so forth. All personal identifiers, including references to awards, geographic details, or organizational affiliations, were omitted to protect identities. Audio recordings were securely stored in an encrypted digital folder accessible only to the researcher. Given the sensitivity of the material, the recordings were permanently deleted after the completion of transcription and translation, ensuring full compliance with ethical data-handling standards.

Although English was initially preferred as the interview language, all participants expressed greater comfort in Urdu. As a result, the interviews were primarily conducted in Urdu, which allowed for more authentic and emotionally expressive responses. The researcher personally handled all transcription and translation work due to the highly sensitive nature of the data and the need to prevent any risk of exposure through third-party involvement. To ensure the fidelity and accuracy of the translations, a back-translation process was undertaken. Selected sections of the English text were retranslated into Urdu and compared with the original transcripts to confirm that the intended meanings and nuances were accurately preserved.

The interview guide was designed with reference to Reese's (2001) hierarchy of influences model, emphasizing how individual, organizational, and external dynamics shape journalistic practices. Once the transcription and translation were complete, the data underwent an inductive thematic analysis based on the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). Open codes were first generated directly from the interview material, followed by axial coding to connect related ideas and patterns. These were then organized into broader themes that captured the structural and personal dimensions of journalistic self-censorship and perceived risk.

4. Findings

4.1. Macro Level Threats

4.1.1. Establishment's Control On of The Media

The most influential and powerful actors in Pakistan are probably the intelligence agencies, therefore it can be perilous for journalists to criticize them, as they are suspected of dominating the media. They are suspected of dominating the media and have been linked to a series of kidnappings of journalists.

"I covered a few stories that the ISI did not welcome. I received multiple threats, and for my own safety, I had to leave Pakistan and continue living abroad" said Respondent 2.

It is compelling for journalists to constantly harbor a fear of military and intelligence forces in the back of their minds, so they train themselves to never speak negatively of them. Journalists are generally reluctant to write and report anything against the establishment as they have witnessed many colleagues being abducted, tortured, and killed. These organizations are particularly threatening due to their extensive resources, which enable them to monitor communications, intimidate, and endanger journalists more effectively than other public bodies. In one notable instance, Geo TV aired reports accusing the ISI of targeting journalist Hamid Mir. Consequently, the channel faced cancellation of its broadcast license, and the distribution of its leading newspaper was disrupted (Pintak, L., Brian, J. B., & Nazir, J. S., 2016

4.1.2. Legal pressure:

Mishra (2008) explained that the media laws in Pakistan are drafted and passed to protect the interests of the establishment rather than to give the people more direction. Freedom of expression (2017) elaborated the perils of the nation's blasphemy laws and the crackdown on journalists and bloggers linked to blasphemous material. In 2017, the Islamabad High Court demanded the extradition of bloggers who were outside of Pakistan while also locating those

were inside the country. The blasphemy law is particularly perilous for journalists, as it gives authorities unrestricted power to vilify individuals and legitimizes harsh measures, including violence, arrests, and even capital punishment, against those accused under it. Thus, it has evolved into a new strategy used by the state to defend its violent onslaught on their targets.

Cyberterrorism is another law that is also frequently used against journalists. This law is exceptionally harsh because it not only criminalizes journalism, but also damages a journalist's reputation in society and in journalism by linking them to terrorism.

4.1.3 Economic pressures:

Journalism is often treated as a commercial enterprise. Generating profit frequently takes precedence over the responsibility to inform the public and act as a societal watchdog. Reporters are frequently encouraged to find stories that entertain or capture the audience's attention. Apart from Pakistan Television, almost every TV channel engages in entertainment-based news. Private news TV channels in Pakistan frequently use sensationalist techniques, replaying the same clips multiple times and pairing them with dramatic and intense music. In addition, journalists are directed to gather numerous news stories rather than focusing sufficiently on crucial ones because quantity is valued above quality.

Another particularly intriguing aspect of journalism as a business is the dearth of criticism of the banking, telecommunication, and mobile phone industries in Pakistani media due to those industries' extensive use of advertising. These particular telecom and banking organizations are major stakeholders in Pakistani news industry as they have heavily invested across all news platforms, making them crucial to the media's financial survival. Therefore, they are not just untouchables for the broadcast, but also the print media. With journalists experiencing financial crisis in an already sinking economy of Pakistan, running journalism as a purely business model worsens the matter and poses a serious threat to the freedom of speech in Pakistani media.

4.1.4. Religious and socio-cultural pressure:

Horton (2011) emphasizes the importance of cultural norms and religious influence, which is particularly pronounced in Pakistan, where religion is deeply embedded in society and widely embraced by the population. The religious organizations in Pakistan go to great lengths to convert Pakistanis to their way of thinking in an effort to install Sharia rule. The country's largest religious organizations, for instance Tahreek-e-Labaik (TLP) Pakistan and Jamiat Ulema Islam Pakistan frequently block streets, plunder stores, and display severe violence for instances and events that go against their ideologies.

The threat of such extremist groups prevent journalists from not only reporting against them but also against subjects that go drastically against their ideologies. Thus, journalists opt to self-censor themselves due to pressures from religious groups.

Moreover, such is the power of religion in the country that even common citizens can target journalists over anything against their sentiments. The threat posed by the average person is likewise concerning and extremely dangerous for journalists in Pakistan.

"Mashal Khan, a student and activist, was lynched on university grounds by his classmates from the journalism department because his writings challenged their beliefs. It shows that even ordinary individuals can pose a serious threat if one is not careful" said Respondent 7

4.2 Meso-level threats

4.2.1. Organizational policies:

Donsbach (2004) and Skjerdal (2010) signified organizational policies as a significant barrier that journalists come across. Every institution has specific guidelines and standards, and journalists are expected to abide by them. Most journalists avoid submitting material that contradicts their organization's policies, knowing that such content is unlikely to be approved by editors or the news desk. Some journalists decide to write on topics that align with the needs of their company in order to make a good impression and increase the likelihood of their stories to be published on the front page. Organizational guidelines play a major role in limiting coverage, resulting in culturally sensitive topics such as religion, minority rights, sexual harassment, and LGBT issues receiving little attention.

4.2.2. Corruption:

Another distinct and shocking problem associated with Pakistani journalism is the normalcy and frequency of blackmailing that is practiced by several journalists. Regional and small level publications hire a number of journalists and give them a press card not only to earn for themselves but also for the publication houses by means of blackmailing people. These journalists are notorious to extort money by threatening restaurants, small companies, and vendors. Businesses that are associated with the food industry are especially vulnerable to such blackmailing as any negative report against them can drastically affect their business. A journalist was recently arrested in 2012 for blackmailing a businessman in Multan by FIA (Dawn, 2012). Moreover, mid-level journalists often try to find out any corruption or scandal related to wealthy and famous people, not to report it but to extort money for not reporting it.

4.2.3. Family:

The pressure journalists face from their families also has a significant impact on how frequently they self-censor themselves. Numerous families worry about the safety of their relatives in journalism and discourage them from reporting on topics that might expose them to risk. The dominance of parents and guardians in Pakistan over children even when they are adults is extra-ordinary, courtesy of the joint family system that commonly prevails. Thus, on many incidents, parents forbid their journalist children to write about taboos or subjects that they personally are uncomfortable with.
"I avoid covering issues related to women's empowerment because my father disapproves. I had intended to report on the women's march in Pakistan, but I refrained because of his opinion," explained Respondent 1.

4.3 Micro-level threat

4.3.1 Personal aspirations

Some of the major threats to Pakistani journalism starts at its very root. Journalism is considered as an easy subject and most people study it because they fail to get admission in engineering, medical and fine arts school. Therefore, many people who fail to excel in other subjects choose to study mass communication in order to have a graduate degree.
"It might surprise you to know that I first always wanted to study computer sciences, but I repeatedly failed the exams, so I tried journalism because it was easy to pass, and that's how I entered this field' said R3.
"I had aimed to become an architect, but after failing in that, I had little choice and opted for journalism because it was easier to pursue," said R1.
Therefore, there is a significant influx of journalism students that graduate every year but there are few vacancies to cover them. This paves way for a vicious cycle where local

newspapers hire interns for minimal compensation and then expect them to make connections and learn to work.

In mainstream television channels and newspapers, where such practices are less common, securing a position is extremely competitive. Moreover, these prominent media organizations provide minimal incentives for interns, despite the large number of journalism graduates entering the field annually.

4.3.2 Job security and financial considerations:

A major threat festering the functionality and integrity of journalism in Pakistan is that related with the finances. While famous and senior journalists in mainstream TV channels enjoy a substantial remuneration and perks, the ones working at a lower or mid-level do not have such advantage. Hence, to earn a livelihood journalist in Pakistan make compromises to their profession and opt for false reporting, blackmailing and other malpractices.

Thus, journalists are severely impacted by financial constraints, as noted by Aslam (2015) and Horton (2011). Making problems worse, the government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf reduced the expenditure on official advertisements distributed to media outlets by 70% in 2019. This further damaged the media industry's financial foundation in Pakistan as these budget cuts not only prevented media outlets from receiving funding from the government, but also forced private businesses to cut back on their spending by 50% (Jamal, 2018). Resultantly, media outlets reduced their staff and sacked several of employees.

"If I am completely reliant on my relatives and friends to lend me money to pay the fee of my children and put bread on the table, and if in circumstances like these, someone proposes to pay me for hiding their corruption, then how do you expect me to deny it?" expressed R6.

Therefore, a lack of revenue poses a serious threat to journalists since it leaves them open to pressure, bribery, coercion, and dishonesty to meet their fundamental needs. There are a few extra amenities that journalists require to function well, in addition to a salary to cover their basic needs. To sustain good relations with politicians, bureaucrats, and influential business figures, journalists need proper equipment, convenient transportation options, and suitable professional clothing. Consequently, when facilities and basic pay are withheld from journalists, they turn to side jobs. Even prominent journalists are suspected of regularly accepting bribes from officials and politicians, and some of them have been caught on camera doing so (The Guardian, 2013).

4.3.3. Fear of safety:

Journalists in Pakistan face severe risks from terrorist organizations like TLP, which have openly claimed responsibility for bombings and killings targeting media professionals. In addition, TTP was also responsible for the assassination attempts on famous journalists like Hamid Mir and Raza Rumi. Furthermore, TLP also conducted attacks on Express Media Group and Peshawar Press Club for covering stories against them.

According to a survey by International Media Support (2009), the most dangerous places for journalists to operate in Pakistan include Balochistan, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) territories. Similarly, studies such as Aslam (2015), Amnesty International (2014) and CIMA (2012) identified these regions as highly unsafe for journalists. Beyond the security risks, these areas are difficult to access, often necessitating special military permissions for reporters to enter. In these areas journalists sometimes need to wear bullet-proof vests in order to deal with the militant groups such as Baloch Arm Defense Army that prohibit any kind of reporting about them.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper provides an analysis of the deeply rooted obstacles and challenges affecting both mainstream journalists in Pakistan and those working at regional or smaller-scale media outlets. Hence, the result of this study varies slightly from Amnesty International (2014) and CIMA (2012) which highlights Pakistani journalists as passive victims that largely accept the dire situation as it is. The respondents in this research often showcased agency where they explained how they get around the posed threats while making the best out of the situation.

This study ranged the threats faced by respondents from micro to meso-level and macro-level. In the light of Reese's (2001) hierarchy of influence paradigm, extra-media threats lie at the macro level spectrum of the threats faced by the journalists. The work of Skjerdal (2010) and Cook and Heilmann (2013), who place a high value on public authority and outside influences for the self-censorship of journalists, can also be related to this category of challenges. Considering that these obstacles are not within organizational boundaries, they are deemed as external and can often pose a serious threat to journalists as they can potentially be violent and life threatening in nature.

In this category as well as overall, establishment of the country is indubitably one of the biggest threats to the landscape of Pakistani journalism. Studies such as Aslam (2015), CIMA (2012), Amnesty International (2014), and Sarwar (2011) all place establishment of Pakistan as the primary threat and this paper finds it no different. Majority of the control, violence, and censorship that are imposed on Pakistani journalists are through their military. The Pakistani military and intelligence agencies exercise substantial control over the media, making it highly challenging for journalists to critique these institutions. Journalists and media organizations often establish professional relationships with senior military officials to secure compliance and favorable coverage. In Pakistan, such networks are crucial as they facilitate access to employment, governmental approvals, judicial processes, law enforcement interactions, and social capital. Consequently, these political and military connections afford journalists considerable influence within society, providing both status and practical advantages in navigating bureaucratic and institutional processes Therefore, while they relinquish the freedom to criticize the military, they simultaneously establish strategic relationships with influential figures. Religion and socio-cultural factors are the other main yields in the macro-level threats. These hurdles address the work of Horton (2011), who believes that socio-cultural elements play a significant role for journalists' self-censorship. Although these barriers are neither violent or life-threatening, they can cost journalists an extreme backlash from the viewers and even cost them their job. Writing on subjects like religion, minorities, and women's empowerment can lead to attacks from not just organized militant parties but also from common people as religious sentiments of Pakistanis cannot be challenged. The work Donsbach (2004), who highlighted the psychological and cognitive characteristics of journalists, constitute the foundation for individual level threats.

As for the meso-level, the challenges were classified as the routine and organizational level threats. At the routine level, this study discovered journalism being practiced as a business, corruption, and pressure from family as the major hinderances for Pakistani journalism. Threats at the organizational level include threats to finances, media ownership, and organizational policies. This level of threat is applicable to all types of journalists, with the exception of freelancers, and affects journalists at a physiological, which is consistent with the views of Skjerdal (2010) and Donsbach (2004) that highlighted organizational mechanisms for journalistic self-censorship.

Job security and financial constraints constitute a significant threat to journalists in Pakistan. The financial instability within the media sector is severe, with many journalists receiving inadequate compensation or experiencing extended periods without pay. As a result, journalists may become vulnerable to bribery and other forms of coercion, prioritizing personal and financial survival over journalistic independence, freedom of expression, or reporting on

politically sensitive, radical, or culturally contentious topics. Thus, to conclude the Pakistani journalistic landscape from the lens of Giddens' (1984) work of structuration, Pakistan is producing a sizable number of journalism students through a weak educational system, for a media that was already weak financially before suffering further losses. Therefore, the standard for journalistic studies is extremely low in the country. However, it is also to be noted that news channels catering such ways of operations are the most popular in Pakistan. The endeavors and set ups that tried to operate professionally have failed in the past and sensationalism within news industry has always been in demand (Pakistanvrratings, 2023). Therefore, the constitutive duality of this social phenomenon occurs when the lack of demand for a professional news industry from the public causes the structure to be incompetent and low on standards. Subsequently, company owners continue to view media as a commodity and profit-making mechanism.

Likewise, 96.3% of the population of Pakistan are practicing Muslims (Mohammad, 2022). Thus, it is the human agents that causes the prevailing dominant culture of Islam within the social structure. It is the agency of the majority of the citizens that causes religion, religious values and religious institutions to be so powerful that nothing can be said against them. Similarly, the cultural values and patriarchy that stems out from such social settings also consolidates the socio-cultural challenges that are faced by the journalists. From the failure of the Me-Too movement to the lack of any reporting against religious affairs, it is the dichotomy of both the existing social structure and human agency resulting in such limitations.

As for the establishment of the country dictating and overly controlling the media, it is also the press that has been glorifying and censoring all sorts of criticism against such institutions. This creates an illusion of a free media and hence gives more power to the establishment to carry on exercising their power. The fact that people in Pakistan perceive media as free because it freely opposes the government is a big contributing element for empowering the military institutions further. The media consistently promotes unfavorable coverage of domestic issues because it boosts sales, and the public generally believes that since the news media is free, it is responsible for portraying all the incorrect aspects of society. Even the media's most significant win in Pakistani history the ousting of General Musharaf was refuted by one of the participants, who insisted that the media was spreading lies and advancing the interests of particular factions. The influence of Pakistani media on political campaigns and government policies remains significant; however, similar to the civil government, it is purportedly subject to control by the establishment. Consequently, the state of journalism in Pakistan is in a unique and complex situation. On one hand, the media is strong enough to overthrow a military dictator, influence government policymaking, and blackmail groups, but on the other, journalists face dire circumstances, including inadequate pay and restrictions on reporting freely. Additionally, journalists are killed, abducted, and subjected to torture. The paradoxical nature of the Pakistani news industry is further reinforced by the historical glorification of the establishment within the media. News organizations that refrain from reporting critically on the military while accepting favors through personal or political connections effectively enable the establishment to act with impunity. Therefore, the fundamental dyad of this social phenomenon realizes its loop when the journalists that are supposed to form cognizance expurgate themselves, and subsequently enables the establishment to pugnaciously take them out without any consequences.

Hence, journalists in Pakistan often navigate these challenges by conforming to the pressures and threats they face. Self-censorship is commonly practiced regarding culturally sensitive topics or content critical of the establishment. Due to insufficient compensation or delayed payments, some journalists may engage in ethically questionable practices to secure their livelihood. Many avoid challenging established norms within journalistic operations, as

doing so can lead to professional and personal risks. Any concrete prospects for addressing these challenges within Pakistani journalism appear to be limited as it requires an entire political overhaul, reorganization of country's educational and economic model, and most importantly the agreement of the establishment to refrain from any intrusions.

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