

# **Constraints in the Professionalization of Journalism in Pakistan: Ownership, Laws and Subjectivity**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper presents the idea that a free media in any society serve for the development of democracy and civil society. However, to relish such role of the media collective efforts by news professionals, owners and state are required to maintain an objectivity norm in the journalism. That is albeit hard to perform to the absolute extent; therefore, the subjectivity of journalists, commercial and other interests of the media owners and media laws have been observed as permeating in the news production process and damaging to the professionalization of journalism. To assess that what factors influence more in the professionalization of journalistic work in Pakistan a survey data was collected from Sindh province. In this way the findings that mention the main influencing factors in the news production process in Sindh Pakistan have been discussed and contrasted with other related literature of other studies.*

KEYWORDS: objectivity; journalists; influence

## **Introduction**

### **Media Monitoring**

An independent, trusted and respected media system serves as a major indicator for the development of democracy and civil society in any country . Therefore, Sawant has called to ‘freedom of speech and expression’ a mother of all civil rights and foundation of the democratic system. In such situation, hence, ‘society has an obligation to monitor media systems so they remain free’ . Because among mass media just take the example of one medium that is newspaper for which C.P. Scott (1946) has been cited that it ‘influences the life of a whole community’ . Therefore, it is stated in surprise by that if the news media are powerful and influencing, then the question of who has influence over the media and changes in that respect stands significant for journalism.

### **Objectivity in Journalism**

To have a positive role of any profession inclusive journalism or news media, objectivity has been put as a linchpin value in the theories of professions . And already much has been debated about the place of objectivity in journalism. For example, objective reporting is supposed to be cooler, rather than emotional, in tone; objectivity guides journalists to separate facts from opinions and to report only the facts; according to objectivity, the journalist’s job is to report news without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping it . The value of objectivity has become ‘a cornerstone of the professional ideology of journalists’ (Lichtenberg, 1991, p. 216) says; or it is called ‘one of the core professional values of journalism’ . Further, according to ‘objectivity assumes that journalists can avoid bringing their personality, values, and inner world into their work or the reporter (I) is expected to remain distanced from the social and political phenomena and actors observed and reported on’. Pratte (1995, p.206) is moreover cited that ‘news reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind’.

However, against objectivity characteristic of journalism argued that ‘There is no universal, objective journalism’; which was latter also supported by the view of that ‘what has long been hailed as the professional model centering on the ideal of the objective reporter, is now increasingly seen as just that: a model; upheld but rarely attained’.

Moreover, about the understanding of freedom of the press in a broad way it is concluded that

*‘It is unrealistic and constrictive to view the freedom of the press as freedom only from government. Such a narrow definition of “free” media is sometimes formulated deliberately to misguide and divert attention from other forces that are far more real and effective in practice to restrict the freedom of the media’*

In this regard the potential groups other than government that influence media work and curtail press freedom are, as enumerated by journalists themselves, media organization owners, politicians, interest groups, advertisers, and audiences, (See Bennet, 2011; McManus, 1994; Schudson, 2003; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Particularly about journalists cites many studies showing that journalists’ subjective beliefs have influence upon their news decisions (Donsbach, 2004; Donsbach and Pattern, 2004; Patterson and Donsbach, 1996; Shoemaker and Rees, 1996; Starck and Soloski, 1977). Further, add that despite the rhetoric of objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality journalists have never completely left the practice of caring. Because, as per some empirical evidence ‘the characteristics of individual journalists affect their coverage of certain issues’. Particularly Fahmy and Johnson’s (2005) have been cited of their survey of 159 embedded journalists who covered to the War in Iraq that ‘the journalists believed individual-level factors such as individual values and professional norms influenced their reporting of the war’. Finally, in the regard of journalists’ influence in the news production process found in the work of Barnhurst and Mutz, 1997; and Patterson, 1993 that overall ‘journalism has become more interpretive and less descriptive across time, which may have increased the influence of journalists over media content’.

Regarding media owners first it has to be clarified that privatization of the media is not a guarantee of journalistic freedom, particularly from political pressures. Rather it is said that ‘the group that is perceived to have increased their influence the most is media owners’. They (media owners) interfere with the work of journalists and explain how journalists can report to politics infer. The media owners also

*‘Decide budgets, set editorial guidelines and policies, and appoint editors and staff, and thus influence the news production processes albeit not necessarily individual news stories’.*

Therefore, the influence of media owners on content is an important concern in the news media. And it is rather supposed as an ominous one when the media ownership is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. One such negative consequence of media ownership’s concentration in fewer hands is exemplified by while citing to Campbell (2005) as follows:

*‘American’s media system is primarily owned controlled by Whites, and media representations of African Americans, especially men, often come under criticism for being stereotypical or uncharacteristic’ (Campbell, 2005).*

Further political organizations, interest groups, corporations and other source organizations have also increased their efforts to manage news (Davis, 2002; Kumar, 2007), particularly by pressurizing weak organizations to accept news subsidies (Gandy, 1982), cites.

## **Becoming a journalist in Pakistan**

In the context of Pakistan threats, violence and economic pressures are common to face for press. Further states citing to Green Press (2006) that working as an independent journalist in Pakistan is difficult and dangerous. Hence in Pakistan media very little performs as a watchdog role. Apparently, there is no direct press censorship in Pakistan; however journalists have indirectly been forced to curtail their reporting due to external reasons. Self-censorship is therefore a big issue preventing the Pakistani print media.

In the perspective of such prevalent situation for journalists in Pakistan this paper attempts to assess the common factors and the magnitude of their influence which hinder to the journalists in Sindh province Pakistan in their pursuit of objectivity. For this purpose a six-itemized scale, used by in a Post-Independence Tanzanian study of journalists, was applied in the survey questionnaire. However, one item 'management guidelines' was dropped from the original scale; because it seemed to the researcher irrelevant to the culture of journalism in Sindh. The remaining five items in the scale were provided with five responses-options in decreasing order from 5 = a lot to 1 = none. The data generated through the scale and the response rate rendered by the journalists regarding five common influencing factors are presented and discussed in the following pages.

### **Methodolgy**

The data collection was conducted with a self-completed questionnaire that was administered to all accessible media organizations in the Sindh province, Pakistan and in all district-level press clubs. The sampling technique was purposive and opportunistic, which made it possible to include as many journalists as possible. Moreover, the survey was inclusive only of those journalists who were regularly employed to work for newspapers, magazines, news agencies, television channels and radio stations as reporters, sub-editors or editors. The survey questionnaire was administered by the field researchers who were available to answer the queries over questions and that to collect securely the filled questionnaires. The questionnaire had a variety of topics related to journalists' careers, training and work experience, the organizations they worked for, their political affiliation, their attitudes to and use of technologies, their press club membership, their education level and their salary and working conditions. In this way a total of 576 working journalists filled questionnaires. The majority (59.0%) of the sampled journalists was accessed at press clubs, 38.0% of workplaces and the remaining 3.0% on their homes.

### **Findings**

#### **Demographic profile**

The table 1 shows that the typical Sindh journalist is male (98.1%), speaks the Sindhi language (70.9%) and is Muslim by religion (96.7%). Academically, the majority (63.8%) of them is a university graduate, and the remaining earned their final degree from colleges (28.5%) and schools (7.7%). Additionally, about their education it was observed that the majority (63.7%) had sought education as a regular student and the remaining proportion (36.3%) as a private student. Regarding the name of the academic institute, the sampled Sindh journalists who had sought their final degree from university (365), among them the majority (54.4%) studied from University of Sindh, Jamshoro and the remaining from Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur

(27.2%), University of Karachi (13.2%) and other various universities (5.2%). Moreover, the first highest proportion (42.1%) of the surveyed Sindh journalists is up to 30 years old, and the second highest (37.5%) between 31 to 40 years old. In the terms of salary, the highest proportion (37.7%) earned monthly less than 10,000 (ten thousand) PK rupees, and the second highest proportion (33.3%) either made no answer (13.2%), put a cross symbol (X) (0.9%), or wrote horrific comments in the questionnaire regarding their monthly remuneration (19.1%); that showed to their weak financial position.

**TABLE1****Composition of the journalists by demographic variables**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	565	(98.1)
Female	11	(1.9)
<b>Ethnicity/Mother language</b>		
Sindhi	405	(70.9)
Urdu	104	(18.2)
Siraiki	24	(4.2)
Other	38	(6.7)
<b>Religion</b>		
Muslim	551	(96.7)
Hindu	14	(2.5)
Other	5	(.9)
<b>Level of education</b>		
School	44	(7.7)
College	163	(28.5)
University	365	(63.8)
<b>Mode of education</b>		
As a private student	197	(36.3)
As a regular student	346	(63.7)
<b>Name of academic institute</b>		
University of Sindh, Jamshoro	198	(54.4)
Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur	99	(27.2)
University of Karachi, Karachi	48	(13.2)
Other	19	(5.2)
<b>Age</b>		
0-30 years (Young)	239	(42.1)
31-40 years (Mature)	213	(37.5)
Over 40 years (Old)	116	(20.4)
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Less than 10,000 PK Rs.	217	(37.7)
Above 10,000 PK Rs.	168	(29.2)
No answer	76	(13.2)
Put (X) cross symbol	5	(.9)
Commented instead of revealing Income	110	(19.1)

**Influencing factors**

According to the table 2 it was observed that news-workers in Sindh mentioned 'media organization's policy' (measured by one item) as the highest influencing factor ( $Mdn = 5.00$ )

upon their journalistic work. Slightly over three fifths (60.5%) of the journalists surveyed said their ‘organization’s media policy’ has “a lot” of influence. The influence of such level upon the journalists of an organization’s policy indicates that the key controllers of the journalists in Sindh are media organizations, in other words media owners, who are able to mould the entire process of news production from gathering to publishing and broadcasting through their organizational policies. Such a situation also underpins the idea that journalistic autonomy in Sindh is limited, in particular, by the policies of media organizations; as mentioned earlier, the great majority (60.5%) of the journalists reported that they were influenced ‘a lot’ by organizational policy. In other words, the survey indicates that journalists gather and edit news remaining within the boundaries set by organizational policies. However, that violates the spirit of ethical journalism; as McManus says ‘ethical journalism gathers information without fear or favor’. This is all because in Pakistan according to ownership structure has two problems; firstly owners and editors are the same people, and second newspapers have left professional quality to pander to owners’ interests.

Additionally, the second highest influencing factor which the journalists reported is ‘government media laws’ ( $Mdn = 4.00$ ), (measured by one item) more than one third (35.5%) of the respondents said that it influences them “a lot”. As far as the ‘personal values’ factor (measured by three items) is concerned, that had the lowest influence ( $Mdn = 2.66$ ) upon the journalistic work as only 16.9% journalists responded that ‘personal values’ influences them “a lot”. The above findings regarding influencing factors coincide exactly with the findings of Post-Independence Tanzanian study of journalists in which found that like ‘Journalists in the USA (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), journalists in Tanzania too considered personal values (measured by three items) as having the smallest influence in their reporting .... Respondents rated organization policy (measured by two items) as the highest influence on their reporting, government position (measured by one item) as second.

**TABLE 2**  
**Composition of the Journalists by influencing factors**

<i>Influencing factors</i>	N	Median	$S^2$	(%) saying influencing “A lot”
<b>1. Media organization’s policy</b>	506	<b>5.00</b>	<b>1.194</b>	<b>(60.5)</b>
<b>2. Government media laws</b>	453	<b>4.00</b>	<b>1.859</b>	<b>(35.5)</b>
<b>3. Personal values</b>		<b>2.66</b>	<b>2.039</b>	<b>(16.9)</b>
Personal values and opinions	471	4.00	1.949	(28.5)
Political orientation	448	2.00	1.971	(10.0)
Ethnic affiliation	425	2.00	2.197	(12.2)

*Note:* Higher median scores equal greater influence. The scale ranges from 5 = ‘A lot’ to 1 = ‘None’.

Moreover, under the factor ‘personal values’ out of three the highest influencing item was ‘personal values and opinions’ ( $Mdn = 4.00$ ) which influences to more than a quarter (28.5%) of the journalists “a lot”. And the lowest influencing item under the ‘personal values’ factor was ‘political orientation’ ( $Mdn = 2.00$ ,  $S^2 = 1.97$ ); regarding which just the proportion of one tenth (10.0%) journalists mentioned that it influences them ‘a lot’ in their journalistic work. In summary, the factor which the journalists considered most influential ( $Mdn = 5.00$ ) is the ‘policy of media organization’ which is followed by ‘government media laws’ ( $Mdn = 4.00$ ) and ‘personal values’ ( $Mdn = 2.66$ ). In the table’s breakdown of “personal values”, the item ‘political orientation’ (10.0%) is at the bottom, underneath the ‘ethnic affiliation’ (12.2%) of the journalists. In other words it seems that the grip of media organizations or owners is tighter upon

journalists than government media laws. This finding supports the notion of McManus. That the autonomy of journalists is bounded by ‘three universal commands’ and one of them is the owners’ interest. Additionally, it is also evident that, to an extent, all five items influence the journalists in Sindh while they report, write and edit the news content, thereby underpinning the idea of Reese and Daniel that ‘journalists have found it increasingly hard to maintain that they are wholly “objective”.’

Moreover, to assess the impact of journalist type and geographic affiliation upon the influencing factors in journalistic work a Mann-Whitney *U* test was run which resulted following statistically significant differences. See table 3 it was found that newsroom journalists ( $M = 4.53$ ) compared with news-reporting journalists ( $M = 4.08$ ) were more influenced by ‘media organization’s policy’ ( $U = 24280.500, z = -2.972, p = .003$ ). Similarly, by the ‘government media laws’ newsroom journalists ( $M = 3.95$ ) compared with news-reporting journalists ( $M = 3.50$ ) were influenced more ( $U = 20562.000, z = -2.200, p = .028$ ). However, in contrast under the factor ‘personal values’ the influence of the item ‘personal values and opinions’ was higher upon news-reporting journalists ( $M = 3.54$ ) compared with newsroom ( $M = 3.03$ ) journalists ( $U = 20404.500, z = -3.442, p = .001$ ). In a similar vein the item ‘political orientation’ was also influencing more to news-reporting journalists ( $M = 2.46$ ) compared with newsroom ( $M = 2.06$ ); ( $U = 19562.500, z = -2.576, p = .010$ ).

**TABLE 3**  
**Distribution of the respondents by Journalist Type and Influencing Factors**

<i>Influencing factors</i>	<b>Journalist type</b>		<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>P</i> Value
	Newsroom	News-reporting			
	Mean	Mean			
<b>Media organization’s policy</b>	4.53	4.08	24280.500	-2.972	*.003
<b>Government media laws</b>	3.95	3.50	20562.000	-2.200	*.028
<b>Personal values</b>					
Personal values and opinions	3.03	3.54	20404.500	-3.442	*.001
Political orientation	2.06	2.46	19562.500	-2.576	*.010
Ethnic affiliation	2.17	2.39	19015.000	-1.508	.131

Note: Higher mean scores equal greater influence. The scale ranges from 5 = ‘A lot’ to 1 = ‘None’. \*. The mean differences are significant at the  $< .05$  levels.

In the context of geographic affiliation (See table 4) the influences of ‘media organization’s policy’ and ‘government media laws’ compared with rural journalists ( $M = 4.01$  and  $M = 3.44$  respectively) were higher upon urban journalists ( $M = 4.49$  and  $M = 3.92$  respectively), ( $U = 26786.500, z = -3.389, p = .001$  and  $U = 21998.000, z = -2.683, p = .007$  respectively). However, in contrast it was found that rural journalists ( $M = 3.52, M = 2.51$  and  $M = 2.47$  respectively) compared with urban ( $M = 3.17, M = 2.09$  and  $M = 2.13$  respectively) were more influenced by three items ‘personal values and opinions’ ( $U = 23436.000, z = -2.871, p = .004$ ), ‘political orientation’ ( $U = 20825.000, z = -3.130, p = .002$ ) and ‘ethnic affiliation’ ( $U = 19871.000, z = -2.187, p = .029$ ) under the factor ‘personal values’.

**TABLE 4**  
**Distribution of the Journalists by Geographic Affiliation and Influencing Factors**

<i>Influencing factors</i>	<b>Geographic affiliation</b>		<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>P</i> Value
	Rural journalists	Urban journalists			
	Mean	Mean			
<b>Media organization’s policy</b>	4.01	4.49	26786.500	-3.389	*.001

<b>Government media laws</b>	3.44	3.92	21998.000	-2.683	*.007
<b>Personal values</b>					
Personal values and opinions	3.52	3.17	23436.000	-2.871	*.004
Political orientation	2.51	2.09	20825.000	-3.130	*.002
Ethnic affiliation	2.47	2.13	19871.000	-2.187	*.029

Note: Higher mean scores equal greater influence. The scale ranges from 5 = 'A lot' to 1 = 'None'. \*. The mean differences are significant at the  $< .05$  levels.

Moreover, to assess the impact of organization type, a Kurskal-Wallis Test was run that resulted following statistically significant differences in the influencing factors. See table 5 that shows that the influence of 'media organization's policy' upon wire-service journalists ( $M = 277.76$ ) compared with broadcast ( $M = 275.25$ ) and print journalists ( $M = 239.30$ ) was higher  $\chi^2(2, n = 506) = 9.69, p = .008$ . Similarly, the factor of 'government media laws' as well had more influence upon wire-service journalists ( $M = 294.50$ ) compared with print ( $M = 205.36$ ) and broadcast journalists ( $M = 254.67$ ),  $\chi^2(2, n = 453) = 23.20, p = .000$ . However, conversely, it was observed that under the factor 'personal values' print journalists ( $M = 248.46$  and  $M = 241.46$  respectively) compared with broadcast ( $M = 220.16$  and  $M = 190.97$  respectively) and wire-service journalists ( $M = 192.52$  and  $M = 232.38$  respectively) were influenced more by the items 'personal values and opinions'  $\chi^2(2, n = 471) = 7.61, p = .022$  and 'political orientation'  $\chi^2(2, n = 448) = 16.04, p = .000$ .

**TABLE 5**  
**Distribution of the Journalists by Organization type and Influencing Factors**

<i>Influencing factors</i>	<b>Organization type</b>			Chi-Square	<i>p</i> Value	
	<b>Print media</b>	<b>Broadcast media</b>	<b>Wire-service</b>			
	N	Mean rank	Mean rank	Mean rank		
<b>Media organization's policy</b>	506	239.30	275.25	277.76	9.69	*.008
<b>Government media laws</b>	453	205.36	254.67	294.50	23.20	*.000
<b>Personal values</b>						
Personal values and opinions	471	248.46	220.16	192.52	7.61	*.022
Political orientation	448	241.46	190.97	232.38	16.04	*.000
Ethnic affiliation	425	220.19	203.99	188.68	2.92	.231

Note: Higher mean scores equal greater influence. The scale ranges from 5 = 'A lot' to 1 = 'None'. \*. The mean differences are significant at the  $< .05$  levels.  $df = 2$ .

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper in the beginning part supports to monitoring the media performance and the working of journalists in any society and the world over. And it is justified with the significance of media freedom that is called a mother of all civil rights and basic structure for democratic system; because, the media have the potential to influence the society. In this way of having a positive impact of media upon any society the objectivity characteristic in the media profession has been highlighted. However, against the objectivity norm the practice of journalism is found to permeate with the influence of subjective beliefs of the news-workers. Moreover, the related available literature cited here mentions to the interference of various other societal factors in the working of news media. The significant among them, pointed out, are media organization owners, governments, politicians, various interest groups, advertisers and audiences as well.

Hence, the norms of objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality have never been followed until the absolute extent.

Moreover, to become a journalist in the context of Pakistan has been pictured as if to walk on a rough terrain; because it is strewn with threats, violence and economic pressures; therefore very hard for the media to perform as a watchdog of the society. Particularly, it was observed on the basis of data collected from Sindh province, Pakistan having 576 working journalists as respondents that despite being typically male (98.1%), university educated (63.3%), and young (79.6%), the journalists in Sindh province Pakistan are 'a lot' under the influence of their media organizations' policies (60.5%). That shows how powerful media owners are against the professionalism of journalism in Pakistan. In this way, this finding supports the views of that journalists in Pakistan curtail their reporting to favor the owners' interests. Mainly because media owners have control over the journalists' wages and their job security; even in most cases the owners and editors are the same, see . In descending order the second factor that influences 'a lot' to the Sindh journalists is 'government media laws' (35.5%). Therefore, it is reported that the legal framework in Pakistan hinders news-workers from reporting and induces self-censorship . Finally, it was found that the factor that influences least to the Sindh journalists is 'personal values' (16.9%).

The above findings of Sindh journalists have similarity with the findings of Post-Independence Tanzanian study of journalists in which found that journalists in Tanzania too considered personal values (measured by three items) as having the smallest influence in their reporting ..... Respondents rated organization policy (measured by two items) as having the highest influence on their reporting, and government position (measured by one item) as second influencing.

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