

Freedom of Expression: A Myth or Reality? A Case of Pakistani Television Journalists

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Abstract

This study is aimed at investigating the impact of security threats on the freedom of expression of Pakistani Television (TV) journalists. It has been observed that a growing trend of curtailment of freedom of expression is becoming new normal in the country. One of the significant problems related to freedom of expression in Pakistani media has been attacks against journalists. Pakistan Press Foundation recorded that 73 journalists have been killed since 2002 (IPEX, PPF and RIDH, 2017). This study has identified the sources and nature of security threats to Pakistani TV journalists. These security threats include threats from owners to threats from secret agencies. The study has been done under the conceptual umbrella of Social Responsibility Theory since Normative Theory deals with agents of control that also govern the laws and regulation and put check on the press freedom. The qualitative research method was adopted to conduct this research. The data was collected from a group of 25 journalists, belonging to major TV news channels of Pakistan through purposive sampling. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to gather responses. The data was analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis technique. All responses were transcribed as verbatim, from which exploratory notes were prepared to derive emerging themes which were further categorized into sub-themes. The data revealed that the respondents not only had concerns regarding their job security rather they were also stopped from covering different packages. The research also presents recommendations to ensure maximum free expression for these journalists.

Keywords: *Freedom of Expression, Journalism, Electronic Media, Threats, Press*

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Introduction

In a democracy, freedom of expression, in all its manifestations, is guaranteed for active and effective participation of the citizens in its functioning. Freedom to express oneself has been declared a fundamental human right and it is guaranteed by a number of regional and international treaties and charters (Sun, 2014). “Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of the press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defense of Pakistan or any part thereof, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, [commission of] or incitement to an offence” (Constitution of Pakistan, p. 12). Aftermath of 9/11 attacks introduced new laws and policies all around the globe, a number of which caused great harm to freedom of expression by introducing restrictions to their work. Pakistan falls among 10 deadliest countries for journalists along with Iraq, Syria, Philippines, Somalia, Algeria, Russia, Columbia, India, and Brazil (CPJ, 2018). Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF, 2015) asserts that Pakistani journalists are not completely free to exercise their right of freedom of expression and they perform duties under constant threats from different violent pressure groups which include political, religious, and ethnic roots; while security agencies also exert pressure on journalists.

During the last couple of decades, journalism has gradually turned into one of the most threatening and deadly career for the people who brace it. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) records multiple shapes of violence against journalists including but not limited to killings, kidnappings, harassment, coercion, and unlawful arrests and detentions (UNESCO, C&I, 2016). Targeted physical assaults against journalists have been disturbingly increasing worldwide during last few years. These attacks have not only challenged journalists’ right to life but it endangers their freedom of expression as well. Such violently aggressive actions against journalists do not only violate their basic human rights but become a major hindrance in democratically accountable governance (Elliott, Elbahtimy, and Srinivasan, 2012).

The International News Safety Institute (2018) recorded 73 journalists were killed in 2018 worldwide while doing their job and exercising freedom of expression. Afghanistan proved to be the deadliest country with 13 killings of journalists and even in one of the most liberal democracies of the world the United States of America 6 journalists and 1 citizen journalist were killed (INSI, 2018). Situation in Pakistan is not different from other countries when it comes to the safety of journalists and freedom of expression. Government and conflicting parties have been posing threat to fundamental right of freedom of expression of the journalists in Pakistan (Aslam, 2015). This study investigates:

- To what extent do security threats affect the freedom of expression of Pakistani TV journalists?
- What measures can be adopted to ensure freedom of expression for Pakistani TV journalist?

Literature Review

Freedom of expression can be considered a worldwide phenomenon which provides the basis of human rights, determined by a large number of treaties, charters and expositions developed at national and international level. It confirms and assures the effective participation of the citizens in the execution of democracy (Malifa, Qaisrani & Khokhar, 2017). It has been observed that freedom of expression, in a democratic state, not only enables the policy makers to encourage and appreciate the difference of opinions rather it paves the ways for the acceptance and implementation of diversity of opinions (Sun, 2014). Chaudary (2014) asserts that freedom of expression brings with it some challenges which the democratic states have to face. Amongst different other challenges, the biggest challenge is to create a balance between the implementation of freedom of expression within the boundaries of law and judiciary and the security for those who exhibit difference of opinions, beliefs and faiths. This freedom of expression needs to be checked as it may bring with it anarchy and chaos if not handled properly.

In the past few years, media in all its forms has achieved pervasive popularity. It can be regarded as an instrument to develop and sustain the possibility of offering a public sphere in the form of a domain where their different issues like opinion formation, raising objection and their ideologies, are not only explained but also discussed and consulted in relation to their society. The news, political talk shows and reviewing programs on the one hand, enable those TV channels to project a platform where all the people irrespective of their social, racial and religious differences have the liberty to raise their voices against common issues and, on the other hand, they employ and manipulate the ideologies of masses and in this way perpetuate their own established ideologies. Besides, media in different forms and these channels also have their embedded affiliations with some specific political party or political or social ideology through conversations, debates and discussions which, to the audience, apparently exude a sense of bias (Saba & Anwar, 2017).

In this regard, Malifa et al. (2017) articulate that the freedom of media is not the freedom in its true sense rather it seems to be the misuse of freedom or authority. This freedom consequently results in the fact that the laws need be established, to avert and discourage the owners of the media houses, editors and journalists from misusing their powers in the name of freedom. The issue that persists is that the social system does not offer rules to safeguard media owners, editors and journalists from political pressure. The safety of journalists is significant for the unrestricted exercise of journalism and for the freedom of expression (UNESCO, C&I, 2016). Rehmat (2014) implies that journalists face many security threats based on their locality, affiliation to a certain media group and ethnicity. Local journalists tend to be more vulnerable to being targeted and are also not trusted properly by the community as well as by the state they serve for (Aslam, 2015). All factors affect how journalists or media practitioners let speech be free in its true essence. In the past few years, the practicing journalism involving societal issues like extremism, violence and conflict makes this as the most difficult profession. Also, Pakistan is among those countries where journalists are not safe and seem to have non-friendly atmosphere which can affect their work (Ricchiardi, 2012).

Research Methodology

Freedom of expression is integral as well synonymous to democracy. Journalists, across the globe, have the responsibility to report. It is evident that press has faced threats which have been considered as barriers to freedom of expression. In Pakistan, journalism has never been a safer trade for the working journalists. Pakistani TV journalists have been facing major threats due to different news items. These threats range from major threats like life threats, assault, to mild pressures. Journalism in this regard has not been a very easy task for the TV journalists.

For studying the elements of control, and to ensure freedom of expression for a better democratic system, the Social Responsibility Perspective serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Social Responsibility theory is an outgrowth of the Libertarian Theory. However, the Social-Responsibility Theory, unlike the Libertarian Theory, does not assume that anyone can use the media to publish anything. Instead, this theory requires the media to adhere to professional standards and codes of conduct when exercising their editorial freedom. Under the Social-Responsibility Theory, the ownership of media is mostly private and practice self-regulation according to standards, codes and guiding principles. The media is relatively free of arbitrary government controls.

Under a Social-Responsible media system, the role of the media is to serve the public, and in order to do so, should remain free of government interference. The idea of this theory is that the media has a moral obligation to provide adequate information for citizens to make informed decisions. However, the different media can retain a liberal notion of healthy public disclosure. The media is also expected to represent the diversity of cultures they represent, and should have high standards for professionalism, truth, and accuracy.

The study aimed to explore and describe the experiences of Pakistani television journalists when they exercise their right to freedom of expression. In this regard, the data was collected from the journalists working with different news channels of Pakistan during the year 2018. Only male journalists were included who aged between 30-35. Their minimum work experience was 5 years. The participants were briefed about the nature of the research and their rights in the research process like utilization of information, confidentiality of information and identity and withdraw from research. The responses were collected through audio recorder and were later translated and transcribed as verbatim. Information obtained was analyzed through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). According to this approach data can be analyzed through following three stages:

Stage 1: Reading Transcript and making Exploratory Notes

Stage 2: Transforming Notes into Emerging Themes

Stage 3: Seeking relationships and Clustering Themes

Data Analysis

سوال 1- کیا آزادی اظہار کی کوئی حد نہیں ہونی چاہئے؟ یا کچھ موضوعات میں اس کی حد بندی ضروری ہے؟

(Question 1: Should there be a limit for freedom of expression? Or it needs to be restricted in some cases?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	The respondent thinks that freedom of expression is must. But you have to consider some society, religious and state matters	Fundamental Right Thinking about society State Interest
Participant 2	Participant thinks that freedom of speech must have some boundaries as it may not cause harm to others.	Society's rights Freedom with Check and balance
Participant 3	Participant thinks that freedom of speech must have some boundaries as it may not cause harm to others.	Society's rights Freedom with Check and balance
Participant 4	Participant thinks that freedom of speech must have some boundaries as it may not cause harm to others.	Society's rights Freedom with Check and balance
Participant 5	Participant thinks that freedom of speech must have some boundaries as it may not cause harm to others.	Society's rights Freedom with Check and balance

سوال 2- جن موضوعات کی آپ نے نشاندہی کی ہے کیا صحافیوں کو ان کی رپورٹنگ کرتے ہوئے از خود سنسرشپ کرنی چاہئے یا یہ کام ادارے، کسی صحافتی تنظیم یا حکومت کو کرنا چاہئے؟

(Question 2: In such topics which you have identified, who should do the needful?
The journalists themselves, their organizations, a journalist body or the government?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	Participant is in favor of self-censorship, the journalist should come up with self-assessment of the roles and duties,	Self-assessment
Participant 2	The participant thinks that only a seasoned journalist can be provided by freedom, otherwise there should be forced censorship.	Self-censorship Forced censorship
Participant 3	The participant thinks that there should be no censorship from outside rather it needs to be from within.	Self-Censorship
Participant 4	The participant isn't clear and just wasted the time of researcher	No theme at all, just a waste of time.
Participant 5	The participant is of the view that there should be censorship at organizational level	Institutional Censorship

سوال 3۔ کیا آپ پاکستان میں آزادی اظہار کی موجودہ صورتحال سے مطمئن ہیں؟ اگر مطمئن ہی تو کیوں اور اگر نہیں تو کیوں؟

(Question 3: Are you satisfied with the current situation of freedom of expression in Pakistan? Give reason if you are agree or not agree.)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	Participant is not satisfied with the situation and thinks that current situation is worse than ever.	Complete Censorship
Participant 2	Participant is strongly dissatisfied with the existing situation of censorship.	Complete Censorship
Participant 3	Participant calls the situation satisfactory with a few reservations.	Partial Censorship
Participant 4	Participant complains about censorship everywhere and shows displeasure.	Complete Censorship

Participant 5 Participant describes it as the worst Complete Censorship
censorship era.

سوال 4. پاکستان میں کس کس موضوع پر اظہار خیال کرتے ہوئے آپ کو مسائل کا سامنا کرنا پڑتا ہے؟

(Question 4: In which topics do you face hardships while expressing yourself in Pakistan?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	Participant points out various subjects where there are restrictions with respective contexts.	Organizational Threats Terrorist Threats
Participant 2	Participant identifies religious beat as the hardest one in this regard.	Religious Threats
Participant 3	Participant states that religious elements do not allow free expression and pose serious threats.	Religious Threats
Participant 4	Participant brings out multiple subjects including military, advertisers and religious elements as detrimental to free expression.	Military Threats Advertisers Threats Mafia Threats
Participant 5	Participant thinks that military is the subject with least freedom of expression.	Military Threats

سوال 5. کیا آپ کو یا آپ کے اہل خانہ کو کبھی کسی خبر کی رپورٹنگ پر دھمکی ملی یا زدو کوب یا ان پر حملہ کیا گیا؟ اگر ہاں تو کیسے؟

(Question 5: Have you or your family ever been threatened, harassed or attacked due to your reporting? If yes, how?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	Participant tells that he was threatened on multiple occasions by the families of the victims of honor killings, by the mafias and by the officials.	Mafia Threats Official Threats
Participant 2	Participant reveals that he received threatening letters on the coverage of religious minority.	Religious Threats
Participant 3	Participant says that he had been receiving threats from a local land grabber.	Landlords Threats
Participant 4	Participant says that his house was fired at when he reported drug dealing in his area.	Drug Dealers
Participant 5	Participant reveals that he was ran over by a car for giving coverage to religious minority.	Religious Threats

سوال 6۔ کیا کبھی دوران رپورٹنگ آپ کو کام کرنے سے روکا گیا؟ اگر ہاں تو کس نے اور کیوں؟

(Question 6: Have you ever been stopped while reporting? If yes, who stopped you and why?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	Participant was never stopped from duty as he always takes permission before coverage.	Permission for Coverage
Participant 2	Participant told that he was stopped from speaking about minorities.	Religious Threats
Participant 3	Participant was stopped by the security personnel.	Agencies Threats

Military Threats

Participant 4 Participant was approached in an intimidating way while he was covering army's internment centers case in court.

Participant 5 Participant left the beat of minorities. Religious Threats

سوال 7- کیا آپ کے ادارے کے مالک نے کبھی آپ کی آزادی اظہار کو متاثر کیا؟ اگر ہاں تو کیسے؟

(Question 7: Has the owner of your organization ever affected you freedom of expression? If yes, how?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	Participant told that the owner never interfered with freedom of expression of his staff members.	No Owner's Threat
Participant 2	Participant shared interference by the owner.	Owner's Threat
Participant 3	Participant told that the owner never interfered with freedom of expression of his staff members.	No Owner's Threat
Participant 4	Participant told that the owner's financial interest have been affecting freedom of expression.	Owner's Financial Threat
Participant 5	Participant told that the owner have been affecting freedom of expression.	Owner's Threat

سوال 8- کیا آپ کے ادارے کی ادارتی پالیسی کبھی آپ کی آزادی اظہار پر اثر انداز ہوئی؟

(Question 8: Has the editorial policy of your organization ever affected your freedom of expression?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
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Participant 1	Participant told that the organizational editorial policy has never affected freedom of expression.	No Editorial Pressure
Participant 2	Participant revealed that editorial policy has been curbing freedom of expression.	Editorial Pressure
Participant 3	Participant revealed that editorial policy has been curbing freedom of expression.	Editorial Pressure
Participant 4	Participant told that the organizational editorial policy has never affected freedom of expression.	No Editorial Pressure
Participant 5	Participant revealed that editorial policy has been curbing freedom of expression.	Editorial Pressure

سوال 9: کیا آپ کے ادارے کی جانب سے مخصوص افراد یا اداروں کی نشاندہی کی گئی ہے کہ ان کی تنقیدی کوریج نہیں کرنی؟

(Question 9: Has your organization identified specific personalities or institutions with a direction not to criticize them?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	Participant said that there is not such instruction in the organization.	No Pressure
Participant 2	Participant told that they have clear instructions for what they cannot show on their television screen.	Organizational Pressure
Participant 3	Participant told that they have clear instructions for what they cannot show on their television screen.	Organizational Pressure

Participant 4	Participant said that there is not such instruction in the organization.	No Organizational Pressure
Participant 5	Participant told that they have clear instructions for what they cannot show on their television screen.	Organizational Pressure

سوال 10. حکومت کو آزادی اظہار کے تحفظ کے لیے کیا اقدامات کرنے چاہئیں؟

(Question 10: What should government do to safeguard freedom of expression?)

Participants	Exploratory Notes	Emerging Themes
Participant 1	Participant answered that the government can safeguard freedom of expression through multiple actions.	Legislation for Journalists Coping Fake News Legislation for Cyber Crime
Participant 2	Participant answered that the government can safeguard freedom of expression through multiple actions.	Punishing Offenders End Impunity
Participant 3	Participant answered that the government can safeguard freedom of expression through multiple actions.	Legislature for Journalists Activate PEMRA Law Implementation
Participant 4	Participant judged government's inaction to be the greatest danger to freedom of expression which should end.	End Impunity Journalists Safety
Participant 5	Participant judged government's inaction to be the greatest danger to freedom of expression which should end.	Government Inaction

Findings and Discussion

The results of the present study revealed the following master themes and sub themes generated from the data. Moreover, they have been categorized as being major

and minor threats depending upon the seriousness of the consequences they might bring to the respondents:

Table: 5(a) *Emerging Themes: Subordinate and Superordinate Emerging Themes*
Subordinate Themes Superordinate Themes

Religious Threats	Extremist Threats	
Terrorist Threats	Institutional	
Military Threats		
Agencies Threats		
Judicial Threats		
PEMRA oppression		Major Threats
Political Threats		
Police Threats		
Government Inaction	State	
Government Pressure		
Government Threats		
Government Oppression		
Complete Censorship		
Ethnic Threats	Pressure Groups	
Mafia Threats		
Footage Deletion		
Equipment Damage		
Equipment Destruction		
Equipment Snatching		
Owner's Financial Threats	Workplace Threats	
Owner's Security Threats		

Constant Job Threats

Family Threats

Personal Threats

Landlords Threats

Gangsters Threats

Mob Threats

Political Pressure

Institutional Pressure

Minor Threats

Judiciary Pressure

Military Pressure

Intelligence Agencies

Pressure

Police accused

Police Inaction

Code of Conduct

Professional Pressure

Social Responsibility

Partial Censorship

Self-censorship

Story Transfer

Social Media Restrictions

Social Media as

Controlled Alternative

Advertisers Pressure

Organizational Pressure

Uncertain Editorial

Policy

Organizational

Censorship

Owner's Personal

Agenda

Partial Organizational

Support

No Organizational

Support

Fake Threats

Personal Pressure

Defamation Issues

Precautionary Measures

Table: 5(b) Subordinate Themes and Superordinate Themes

Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes
Institutional Threats	
State Threats	Serious Threats
Extremist Threats	
Pressure Group Threats	
Workplace Threats	
Personal Threats	
Institutional Pressures	
Professional Pressures	
Organizational Pressures	
Personal Pressures	Minor Threats

The findings of the study establish that the state has a sizeable chunk of responsibility over its shoulders in securing freedom of expression for Pakistani TV journalists. Journalists face multiple threats from different state and non-state actors. There have been numerous incidents of abductions, torture and even assassinations of the journalists due to their free expression on sensitive issues. The respondents believe that the state is responsible for the security of the journalists and by shielding them from violent retaliation of certain quarters, it can protect their right to freedom of expression. The respondents believe that the state can play its part by taking strict action against those who victimize journalists for their views. Such resolve and action at the state level will give confidence to journalists for expressing themselves freely and on the other hand, it will discourage those who pose threats to their security.

A number of journalists who participated in this study maintained that military and intelligence agencies have strong negative influence on their free expression by

bringing on major threats to their safety. The journalists had to tender unconditional apology in almost all such cases.

The revelations of this research inferred that no Pakistani government liked to offer much freedom of expression to TV journalists. Ethnic and mafia threats have also been identified as potentially hazardous for freedom of expression in the current study. It was also observed that the owner's financial interests become threats for freedom of expression. Most of the news TV channels in Pakistan are mostly owned by industrialists and business tycoons who have multiple financial interests in multiple sectors. They do not let their employee journalists go ahead with even a single such story which can harm their financial or business interests.

This study proved that issues like media code of conduct, social responsibility, partial censorship, self-censorship, story transfer, and social media restrictions are major professional pressures on journalists when they try to express themselves freely.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate how much the freedom of expression is given to the Pakistani journalists which they can exercise. The research highlights the factor of immense pressure from state agencies on the media, which emphasizes on the need for certain measures to be taken which may include media organization's close liaison with the government to form a code of conduct for state agencies in media matters. This research has identified some flaws at the government level, like failure to introduce and implement appropriate legislation for the security of the TV journalists. The government should move to provide legal cover to journalists.

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