

Critical Analysis of Journalistic Autonomy in Pakistan

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Apparently, Pakistani media is considered as one of the vocalists in the South Asia. This study surveyed 242 Pakistani journalists from across the country to investigate their journalistic autonomy. The findings reveal that military and state security, editorial policy, advertising considerations, media owners, media laws and regulations, editorial supervisors are the detrimental factors for journalistic autonomy in Pakistan. The study further shows that journalists at higher positions enjoy greater autonomy as compared to journalists in lower positions. Besides, Journalists' low salary, meeting deadline, taking lead on other media outlets for breaking news, the power of media owners are also causing unprofessionalism and low journalistic autonomy in Pakistan.

Keywords: Pakistan media, Journalistic autonomy, media professionalism

Autonomy comes from a Greek word 'autonomos,' meaning living under one's own laws. Dictionary meaning of autonomy is 'not to be controlled by outside forces. So, autonomy is an amount of freedom and discretion given to a worker over his or her job. The more a person enjoys autonomy, the greater he/she does the job with responsibility. Media autonomy is a driving force for the overall societal development. Postmodern media take autonomy as content diversity and raising voices of those who do not have access to the media. Media autonomy is determined by political, public, and economic base of a society (Seuffer, Wolfgang, Hardy & Gundlach, 2012). Breed (1955) highlights that selection of news is determined by the news value as well by sociological factors, like senior media management, evading incongruity and social structure. He further argues that Journalistic autonomy is restricted by the Media structure, social and political ideology and media professionalism. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) find that construction of media content is influenced by variety of factors before it finally reaches to the public.

Pakistani media are considered as one of the vocalists in the South Asia but in reality true freedom is yet far from truth (Waseem, 2006). In the Present regime of Nawaz Sharif, media is consistently criticizing the government for misuse of public money and infringing democratic values yet at the same time one can see a large list that impede the media to report thing as being sensitive (Shamiela, 2015). There are large numbers of media outlets suffering from financial constraint which impedes them to stand independently. Pakistani media rely mostly on government's press releases and are looking for government advertisements (Pakistan Press Foundation, 2006).

Media-government relationship in Pakistan is based on "Hate and Love". Press freedom has never been consistent. Military has also been a central authority throughout the history (Shamiela, 2015). Although there is civil government in the country for the last about nine year, nevertheless military and bureaucracy have still a say in the national political aura. Memon (2014) describes that during dictator regime the state used phrases like "restrictions upon media", "extreme type of censorship" and "completely under control", while during the democratic regime, the phrases are then used as "free media". Nevertheless, Memon (2014) reports that news media even in the democratic regime of Nawaz Sharif are not perfectly free.

Media owners, agenda of varied groups, governments, advertisers, market size, media audience, etc. influence the construction of media contents and seriously challenge the so called "Free Media" in Pakistan. The following factors are responsible for the low autonomy in the Pakistani media sociology:

- a. Media owners are working as chief editors in both print and electronic media, thus have greater say in the construction on news content. Journalists hand are tighten in their presence.
- b. Journalists are working on contractual basis with very low salary. This situation keeps journalist in low esteem
- c. Different regimes in Pakistan used legal and constitutional means to control the press from public debate and criticism. In its seventy years of its history, Pakistan has been ruled by military more than the civilian. Press in Pakistan usually faces threats, violence, economic pressure, etc. Dictatorial regimes created laws and rules which curtailed the media autonomy. Under Pakistani laws, absolute freedom of speech and autonomy of press do not confer. Constitution of Pakistan constitution media freedom of speech in matters of Security of the State, Public order, Decency and morality, Contempt of court, Defamation, Incitement to an offence, and Sovereignty and integrity of Pakistan.
- d. Many news organizations have lost focus on investigative journalism due to greed for getting more money through commercialization of news. There are mechanisms with the government in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting that controls the media through advertisements. This lever exerts influence on media to kill story against the government or publish story to favour certain government policy. According to a law, no any government department is allowed to publish its advertisement directly in the media. It has to be routed through the Press Information Department of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Advertisement is the soul of media. If it is controlled it mean the media is controlled. The share of government advertisement in the Pakistani media is more than 40%.

This study aimed at investigating the question of whether and to what extent Pakistan journalists exercise autonomy in the journalistic functions. Specifically the study focused on the factors that influence media autonomy in the Pakistani media landscape. The study surveyed 243 journalists of all categories in both print and electronic media across the country to find out their experience about the use of autonomy. Since the study found striking findings on the phenomena, so, it will be useful for policy makers, media owners, academia, media students' and researchers in the larger understanding of the factors that cause media autonomy. And since the study generated useful body of knowledge on autonomy in the Pakistani media scene will be an eye opener for the media owners who are also chief editor of their media outlets; to realize that media autonomy is the key for a viable, sustainable trust worthy media in Pakistan.

Socio-Political Scenario in Pakistan

Pakistan became an independent state after division of the Indian subcontinent into two states— Pakistan and India with the intention that Muslim and Hindus should live independently since both the nations were very conformist in their ways of life, customs, traditions, and religions (Media in Pakistan, 2009). Pakistan has a parliamentary form of government with four federating units/provinces; i.e., Punjab, Baluchistan, Sindh and Khyber Pukhtunkhawa with capital territory of Islamabad. Pakistan covers the land mass of 803,944 sq. km. (310,403 sq. miles) with almost 190 million population (96% Muslims) with average household size of 6.6. The growth rate of population is about 2.1 percent—One of the highest growth rates in the world. (Economic Survey 2000 – 2002, Government of Pakistan). According to State Bank of Pakistan, conversion rate September 2015 one dollar equals 104 Pak rupees. Pakistan is located between latitude 24 and 37 degrees North and longitude 62 and 75 degrees East. India is located to its east, Afghanistan in the north-west, Iran on the west, China in the north and Arabian Sea on the South (Mazhar, Javaid & Naheed, 2012). This strategic geographical and geopolitical location makes Pakistan very important in the world geopolitics. After the incident of 9/11, Pakistan has received the focus of attention in the entire world's media and brought it at the center of universal politics (Media in Pakistan, 2009)

Media Landscape in Pakistan

Media landscape in Pakistan over the past decade changed considerably. On the genesis of Pakistan there were only five radio stations, a couple of newspapers and less any television station. Till the early 2000s one state control television and dozens of radio stations were operative. As trends in the international sphere altered it also affected the media landscape in Pakistan. Economic boom in telecom industry, commercialization

in media and most importantly globalization and Open Airways compelled even the Pakistan Dictator President, General Pervez Musharraf to allow more media outlets. Consequently the last decade led to the mushroom growth of TV and Radio channels in the country. Currently, there are more than 100 TV channels, around 200 FM Radio stations, approximately 3000 thousands newspapers, and a huge network of advertising agencies operating in the media landscape of Pakistan (Pakistan Press foundation 2009; Siraj 2009). The augmentation in literacy played a vital role in the successful operation of multi and cross media channels in Pakistan. Newspaper industry owned media groups have launched their TV channels, e.g.; Jang Group – Geo, Dawn Group—Dawn TV, Nawa- e-Waqt Group—Waqt TV, etc. The growth also led to the modern infrastructure in media industry, such as state of art equipped technologically studios, communication facilities, more skilled workers and media education. This boom has created job opportunities in the media industry. This new communication environment has given more choices to the audiences and opens up their perception towards globalization and modernization. The religious segment of the society showed their dismay and felt that TV contents are too much westernized and immoral. Counter to this tendency, the Islamic forces opened up separate TV Channels for propagation of Islamic values (Siraj, 2009).

The current state of media freedom in Pakistan is quite improved as compared to the previous regimes, particularly, the dictatorial regime of General Pervez Musharraf. The moment for the restoration of judiciary and the legislation on the right to Information Act paved way to more freedom in the media. The Lawyers' Movement in Pakistan started in response to the actions of 9th March 2007 by the country's military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf who called the Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry to resign or face 'charges of misconduct'. The Chief Justice refused to resign. So he was forcedly removed from the office. The Layer Association of Pakistan declared act as "an assault on independence of judiciary". The movement was also joined by the journalists and civil society. As a result, the chief judge and overall judiciary were restored. This also impacted on the media autonomy in Pakistan. Similarly, the parliament of Pakistan has passed Right to Information Act, which gave the media access to public documents. Although journalists have still problems in getting to the public document, nonetheless it's the new Act is way to media freedom.

Alongside the growth of media outlets, democracy is also gaining grounds in Pakistan as people are now choosing their political representative through votes. Vociferation of media is now being tolerating by the government. Stiff competition in media houses is attracting more and more audience toward variety of contents. Informing on social, political and economic issues are accounting for answerability of politicians, and state institutions. The shift from controlled media environment to an open media competition is now facilitating audience to enjoy more selectivity and enabled media a power actor in playing the supervisory role (Waseem, 2006; Siraj, 2009).

Growth in the broadcast media has almost brought the print media to a death point (Shamiela 2015). There are also quite a good number of regional channels providing social and psychological needs gratifications to the ethnic audiences. The regional programming and social media are providing voice to those that were previously barred from political discourse and empowering them on ethnic and linguistic lines of country's politics. The growing literacy rate (about 50 %) making the audience more reliant on broadcast enabling media to formulate public opinion easily (Shamiela, 2015). This addiction for media exposure has brought a balance in the society between the common people and the elites and changing the social and political landscape of the society. This multiple TV channels have given the users more control in the construction of media contents, (Siraj 2009) whereas, Waseem (2006) argues that private channels prefer more newsworthiness, amusement and sensationalism in the content construction. It was highlighted that hourly based TV news, current affairs and analysis programs are affecting the audience awareness. Nonetheless, Siraj, (2009) argues that the use of multi-channels television and social media have created fragmentation and segmentation in the society which are affecting the social fabric. He views that there is a tendency of time displacement which is affecting social capital in the social interaction. This new scenario of media landscape has cataclysmically changed perception of the people in Pakistan towards their life style ideologically and customarily. Siraj and Hussain (2012) say that audiences are now willing more towards globalization and westernization of media contents.

Alam (2013) argues that although Pakistani media did a crucial job in highlighting corruption in the past few years but corruption also goes alongside in the Pakistani media. He further explains that sensationalism is on the rise which led to a question of accountability of media and the journalistic profession in Pakistan. "Beat reporters, desk editors and program anchors at the leading English and Urdu newspapers and TV channels in Pakistan are reluctant to publish news stories without receiving some sort of gift or reward". Even anchors and politicians blame each other for "Lifafa" journalism on live TV programs (Alam 2013). Criticizing the role of Pakistani media, it is said that "Media like the political polarization in country is also divided into anti-government, pro-government, and right-wing groups, with each entity trying to rub-in its own skewed and partisan views on national issues and even resorting to smear campaigns against their supposed rivals".

Literature Review

The function of watchdog and fourth pillar of the state can be performed in a democratic society only when media enjoy ample autonomy (McQuail, 2010; Habermas, 2006). Sigal (2016) argues that "autonomy of media is important factor in democratic and civil society to protect human rights. Khan (2002) describes that majority countries are scared of the press; therefore, they do like full autonomy of media. They control the press through rules, regulations, ideology, security issues, state sensitivity etc. HelleSjøvaag (2013) argues that political, economic and media organization can restrict journalist from exercising autonomy. He further explains that "autonomy is attained when journalists engage in the recursive reproduction of the institution. The level of autonomy enjoyed by journalists therefore remains a fluid concept that is continually adjusted to manage the daily task of reporting the news". Media autonomy is influenced by external and internal forces. The external factors are, "political autonomy of the news organisation, including policy, state censorship, legislation and regulation". While the Internal dimensions are "journalists' freedom to make decisions free from management pressures, commercial factors and forces inside the news environment", (HelleSjøvaag, 2013; Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013).

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) observe that Journalists' personal attitude, demography, racial prejudice and owners of the newspapers have influenced on media content. Gitlin (1980) explains media autonomy is the outcome of structure and thus news can be defined as what Journalists tend to explain as the product of professional judgment. Journalists adjust their news judgments to align with the mind of editors, (Gitlin, 1980). Örnebring (2013) argues that media autonomy has two levels—Institutional and Practice. At the Institutional level, media autonomy involves independence from other socio-political and economic institutions. Whereas, at the media practice level, autonomy mean latitude that a journalist practices during his/her journalistic function, (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013). Breed (1955) argues that selection of news is not only part of the journalistic routine but it also refers to the social factors, such as normative behavior, conflict interest, editorial hierarchy, etc. Journalists' autonomy is limited by variety of factors, such as journalist's Institutional practices, socialization and professionalization efforts, (HelleSjøvaag, 2013).

Advertisements and media income from advertising is crucial to the survival of media, therefore, bigger the advertiser, the greater its impact on media content (Siraj, 2009). Sigal (2006) argues that the problem with investigative journalism is eyesore to the government as well as commercial dealers. Both the entities control advertisements that fuel the cash flow of the media balance sheet. He further argues that "controlling the purse-strings gives them virtual VETO powers over investigative journalism". Sigal (2006) comments that in Western countries corporate media consider investigative journalists top of the line, whereas in Pakistan their presence are barely tolerated. The study finds the influence of news is diminished in favour of advertisers, audiences and politicians. Other research studies have found that political and economic factors have had a low impact on perceptions of autonomy (Hanitzsch, 2011; Mellado & Humanes 2012; Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013).

While commenting on the autonomy in the global communication perspective, Stalder (2003) comments that there are few media giants who control the world media flow both in the developed and developing countries. These world media moguls are AOL Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Vivendi Universal, Sony, Viacom and News Corporation. These powerful gatekeepers decide what to be published/aired and what not. This powerful transnational media is being criticized in the third world for ignoring the genuine desires of indigenous people. Chomsky and Herman (2002) argue that media work is based on the economic and ideological structural of the society. The power of Media Moguls in the third world countries and their

oligopolistic attitude do not allow new media outlets to develop. In the presence of these big media giants, running an independently free media is not possible. We have the example of Aljazeera which major shares have been taken over by these media companies. In fact, Aljazeera was presenting opinion on the world’s issues contrary to the main stream world media controlled by the above mentioned media giants

Research Questions

The above discussion led to the following research questions.

R.Q 1: Whether and to what extent journalists in Pakistan are exercising autonomy in the journalistic functions?

R.Q.2: What are the factors that influence media autonomy in Pakistan?

Method

This study is based on survey research design. The study used a questionnaire designed by the World Journalism Studies for data collection from different countries of the world on media system. This research study represented Pakistan and collected data from the working journalists of print and electronic media across the country. The help of Chairpersons/Heads of Mass Communication Departments of various Universities in major cities of the Pakistan were sought who used their students for data collection during the year 2015 from 243 journalists conveniently available in the media outlets and press clubs in the respective cities. Ten responses were not included in the analysis because they had large numbers of missing responses.

The questionnaire began with the demographic variables followed by Journalistic autonomy variables; i.e., freedom in selecting news stories; aspects emphasize in story; and participation in editorial decision. Other important items in the questionnaire were relating to the ethical perspective and factor influencing media ethics. The test of reliability on the Cronbach’s Alpha generated 0.73 for journalistic autonomy, 0.77 for ethical perspective 0.94 for factors influencing autonomy and 0.82 for reporting practice. Keeping the nature of data, the researcher used mostly descriptive statistics to answer to the research questions. SPSS version 21 was used for data analysis.

Results

Tables 1 to 5 show characteristics and operational sociology of media organizations in Pakistan. As evident from the tables, majority of the journalists are male and most of them are reporter working in different print and electronic media organizations. These journalists were covering mostly news/current affairs and political stories. Most of journalists were working on contractual basis but do not work for other organizations. Media landscape in Pakistan is dominated by the private own media whose major focus is to cover national affairs. Mean year experience of the Pakistani Journalists was 11. The highest and lowest year mean journalistic experience was Managing editor and chief editor respectively.

Table 1

Journalists participated in the study

Chief Editor	Managing editor	Desk head	Senior editor	Producer	Reporter	News writer	Other	Total
17 (7.3)	4 (1.7)	11 (4.7)	10 (4.3)	39(16.7)	102 (43.8)	17 (7.3)	32 13.7)	233(100.0)

Table 2

Beat of journalists

General News	Politics	Foreign	Economy	Crime	Culture	Others
11 (47.2)	58 (24.5)	9 (3.8)	8 (3.4)	20 (8.5)	22 (9.4)	7 (3.0)

Table 3

Medium Reach

Local	Regional	National	Transnational
7 (4.1)	33 (19.3)	92 (53.8)	39 (22.8)

Table 4
Journalists Employments in Private and Public media organization

Full-time employment	Part-time employment	Freelancer	Others	Private Media	Public Media
194 (81.2)	22 (9.2)	4 (1.7)	19 (7.9)	144	26

Table 5
Journalists' Gender and Experience

Male	Female	Mean Year Experience
187(91.2)	18 (8.8)	11

R.Q 1 Whether and to what extent journalists in Pakistan are exercising autonomy in the journalistic functions?

Table 6 shows journalistic autonomy. According to Table, majority of the journalists wanted to have autonomy in selecting stories. Its mean score on the 5-likert scale was 3.60. Similarly, 32.3% Journalists liked to participate in the editorial coordination. Its mean was 3.50. 25.8% Journalists' responded to have autonomy to aspects emphasize in story. Its mean score was 3.91, higher than all the other autonomy parameters.

Table 6
Perceived Journalistic Autonomy

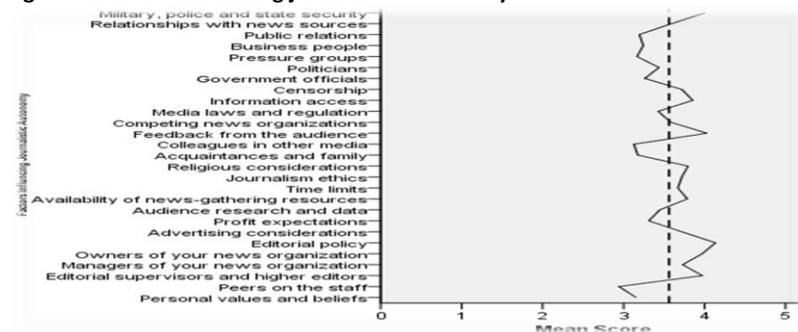
Journalistic Autonomy	Responses			Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	Mean Score	
Selecting stories	96	41.9%	3.60	59.3%
Aspects emphasized	59	25.8%	3.91	36.4%
Participate in editorial coordination	74	32.3%	3.50	45.7%
Total	229	100.0%	3.67	141.4%

Note: The Mean score is out of 5 on the likert scale. 1 being very low and 5 very high

R.Q. 2 What are the factors that influence media autonomy in Pakistan?

Figure 1 shows the factors that affect journalists' autonomy in the journalistic functions. The factors that influenced journalists' autonomy are: editorial policy; military and state security; feedback from the audience, advertising consideration; media owners; media laws; and editorial policy and supervisors. The mean score of these influential factors on journalistic autonomy was about 4 out of 5 on the likert scale. The factors that moderately influenced autonomy are access to information; acquaintances and family, religious considerations; time limit; and relationship with other media organizations. However, factors that do not significantly influence the journalistic autonomy are public relations, business people, pressure group, government official, profit expectation, feedback from the audiences, competing with other media organizations, colleague in media, peer of staff and personal belief.

Figure 1: Factors influencing journalistic Autonomy



Note: The Mean is based on the 5 likert scale. 1 being very low and 5 very high

Table 7 tells about journalist positions in the media organizations and their perception on the media autonomy. The table shows that journalists in higher position enjoy greater autonomy as compare to the lower position in all the indicators of autonomy. As evident from the table, Editor in Chief, Managing editor, and Head of Media Department are enjoying greater autonomy in participation of editorial coordination with 4 Mean score. Similarly, Senior Editor and Reporter enjoy more autonomy in emphasizing aspect in the story with 4 Mean score. However in selecting of stories, only the Managing Editor as compare to other positions enjoys more autonomy with 4 Mean score.

Table 7
Autonomy by Media Workers

Position in Media organization		Selecting stories	Aspects emphasized	Participate in editorial
Chief Editor	Mean	3.82	3.65	4.65
	Std. Dev.	1.18	0.70	0.49
Managing editor	Mean	4.00	3.25	4.25
	Std. Dev.	0.81	0.96	0.96
Desk Head	Mean	3.90	3.91	3.09
	Std. Dev.	0.87	1.30	1.38
Department Head	Mean	2.83	2.57	4.43
	Std. Dev.	0.41	0.54	0.79
Senior Editor	Mean	3.93	4.00	3.65
	Std. Dev.	1.03	1.00	0.71
Producer	Mean	3.64	3.85	3.48
	Std. Dev.	0.98	1.13	1.11
Reporter	Mean	3.12	4.47	3.94
	Std. Dev.	0.60	1.13	0.56
Total	Mean	3.65	3.85	3.70
	N	185	185	171
	Std. Dev.	0.98	1.11	1.05

Note: The Mean is based on 5 likert scale. 1 being very low and 5 very high

Discussion

Media autonomy has relationship with how news becomes news. Over the last decade, the landscape of mass media has been deeply transformed and is characterized by socio, political, economic, and concentrated ownership. Dependence of mass media, private or public is based on advertising revenue. In view of this, powerful gatekeepers are serving for the interest of the dominant class in the society. Consequently, media contents are constructed to satisfy the wealthy, young middle-class and political elites. Media independence is controlled by the structuring avowal of specialized standards couple reward (HelleSjøvaag, 2013). He further argues that factors such as political, economics and organizational restrict journalist media autonomy either it news production, editorial or other form of journalistic writing. This research study also found similar findings such as see Figure 1, which shows that journalists’ autonomy is greatly influenced by the editorial policy; state security; and feedback from the audience.

HelleSjøvaag (2013) also reports that journalistic autonomy is a fluid concept that is constantly adjusted to the daily task of reporting the news. Findings of this research study also support this as Figure 1 shows that journalists enjoyed more freedom in emphasizing aspect in their stories but their independence is limited in selection of stories and participation in the editorial decision. Selection of news stories is controlled by the senior when the issue is sensitive. Editorial decision in Pakistani media organization is usually confined to the senior management. This can be also be evident from figure 1 which show that journalistic autonomy is moderately influenced by the factors such as: information access; owners of the media organizations; editorial supervision/senior colleagues; and relationship with other media organizations. Moreover, Table 7 is about positions of media worker and their perception on the media autonomy. As evident from the table, journalists enjoy greater autonomy in the higher position as compare to lower position in all the indicators of autonomy.

Research study of Warren Breed (1955) also generated similar results that selection of news is determined by senior media management and social structure. His study further found that Journalistic autonomy is restricted by the media structure, social and political ideology and media professionalism. Results of the present study are not less than similar to the findings of these previous studies findings on issue of media autonomy however, journalistic enjoy poor or no autonomy inside the media organization on important issues. This study on the matter of autonomy to a great extent supports Hanitzsch (2013) finds; like journalistic autonomy is restricted by organization policy, state censorship, legislation and regulation, media management pressures, commercial factors and forces inside the news environment.

Conclusion

Media-Government relationship in Pakistan is based on "Hate and Love". Pakistan media is striving to play role for democratization of the society but face many heinous factors. Military and state security; editorial policy; advertising considerations; media owners; media laws and regulations; editorial policy; editorial supervisors; and competing with other media organizations are the detrimental factors for the low journalistic autonomy in Pakistan. Journalists sitting at higher position enjoy greater autonomy as compare to journalist at the lower position. Journalists in Pakistan wanted to have autonomy in selecting stories, participating in the editorial coordination, and aspects emphasize in the story but they have moderate autonomy. Besides, Journalists' low salary, meeting deadline, taking lead on other media outlets for breaking news, the power of media owner are also causing unprofessionalism and low journalistic autonomy in Pakistan.

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