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What do you think is the role of PEMRA in media? Do they give proper guidelines regarding the functioning of news and talk shows? Are they sometimes overindulging in the media house business?

PEMRA was supposed to be a regulating authority. Its main purpose was to come up with rules and regulations and monitor Tv channels just like Ofcom in the UK. However, In Pakistan PEMRA is not independent at all, rather it seems like an arm of the executive which seems to function just for the government. I believe that they have a capacity issue as well, but the bigger issue at hand is independence. I have

not seen PEMRA contribute positively to media development in Pakistan. Ofcom in the UK has extremely strict policies regarding monitoring and regulations in general and if any news channel deviates from it, that channel is sued. This is an enormous difference between both regulatory authorities. PEMRA on the other hand depends on the government and I do not see it developing as long as it is not independent.

Do you believe that extreme dependence on government affects the quality and working of PEMRA?

We have this naïve concept that a regulator is always going to reprimand or create hurdles in the broadcasting of shows. The job of the regulator in an industry is to regulate, and this does not mean that it has only one client. We as journalists also need protection and I believe that this is the duty of PEMRA. Sadly, PEMRA is more of a penalizing authority rather than a regulator and we are not seeing the support that we should be getting from them. It is suffocating the

media industry. Recently, I was served a notice by PEMRA for spreading fake news regarding the schemes and changes introduced by the government. PEMRA is not even sure what is fake news and what is political development news. They believe that if you criticize the government, you are attacking the national interest. We as news journalists have our freedom of speech and independence. Through PEMRA they are trying to silence and coerce the media.

Do you believe that our National Interest is so weak that it can be coerced by PEMRA?

It depends on how we define National interest. National interest is a very subjective term and means different to different people. To define and understand it, we need to be aware of the context in which we are using it. National interests change over time, and it is an evolving

term. They are different from what they were 10 years ago. Yes, we can say that national interest is the interest of the nation as a whole, but it can change. National interest in no way means conformity and silence. People have greatly misused this term.

Generally, there is always a person from a specific media house in the media team of the government. Does that influence PEMRA's bias in favor of one media house and against another media house?

The bias from the side of government towards different media channels is somewhat understandable to an extent. PEMRA should not be related to this in any way. It should work as an independent regulatory authority. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, if you are liked by the government you are liked by PEMRA. There should be checks and balances on PEMRA as well. There should be an independent board, independent financing, and funding's for PEMRA. When you rely on the Government for your sustenance and working

you cannot function independently. It becomes impossible. In Pakistan, we have become very polarized as a society. We do not have political parties rather we have personality cults. PTI means Imran khan, PMLN means Nawaz sharif, etc. Democracy is ruthlessly abused here. Parties do not foster the concept of freedom of speech and when these same people come to power the same exploitation and suppression of freedom are carried out.

Do you think that media is giving opposition more space? Because usually in talk shows etc. we can see that they present better views as compared to the party in power?

When you are in the opposition, you can afford to speak the truth. However, this is not the case with the party in power. I do not think that media always supports the opposition, but this has

been commonly thought of all around the world. The guns will always be focused on the people in authority, and they will always be questioned more.

I have a similar question regarding the issue discussed in the above question, sometimes during the speeches of the National assembly, some speeches are completely censored by certain news channels. Is that done by the media house or PEMRA?

: This is done by the media house. Two-three things need to be pointed out in this regard. Certain things are not allowed to be discussed easily, for example, Army, history, etc. I believe that times have changed a lot now. Five years back we were not given the freedom that we are

given now to discuss certain topics. PEMRA does have some legal regulations that news channels have to follow. For example, you cannot show vulgar language on Television. So, most TV channels play it safe.

Do you believe in the Political autonomy of the Media houses?

Media is a full-fledged power play now. One of the leading channels was working for hand in glove with the Nawaz government. Now another news channel is playing the same role that the previous channel played with the present government. When you involve yourself in such

games then you have to bear the negative consequences that come with it. I do believe that there is an abuse of power by the media, and it has become immensely powerful over the years.

This is a general observation, but when we have to see a neutral point of view, we switch to your channel or two or three other channels. Do you think that the freedom that the two leading rival news channels have, is troublesome?

The best thing about media is the power of the remote. You switch to a different channel if you do not find the one you are watching credible. All media houses are family-owned enterprises. The offices are owned by family members. Over the years they have lost their credibility. News channels do not have proper professionals and skilled workers. There is a tussle going on between

the news management the higher management and between the higher management and the government. A lot of our flaws have stemmed from sub-standard professional training. People are not aware that the kind of work they are doing is not ethically correct or illegal. This causes immense problems.

So, there should be an autonomous body like PEMRA that should monitor everything?

Yes absolutely, but then again if regulatory authorities are not properly functioning in third world countries, they can become extremely autocratic. They become the center of abuse. In Pakistan, we have seen the blatant abuse

of Suo-moto, people have forgotten that you cannot use it for every single issue at hand. It is important for the regulatory authorities that they confine to their agendas.

Does any international regulatory model comes into your mind which PEMRA should follow?

I talked about Ofcom UK, and I believe it can serve as a model for our regulatory authorities. I along with several journalists came up with a code of conduct a few years ago. We took the models of around 8-10 countries to develop a code of conduct for regulatory authorities. However, this idea was not further supported as the government wanted an upper hand in this as well. If the government will think of the media as an adversary, then they are not going to support it. It is high time that government understands that this is not an adversarial relationship. Technically, the government and media both represent the people, but it is hard to understand why a conflict between both is there.

Do you think that media houses spread narratives?

Yes, I do believe they do either for TRP or in general. Sadly, the shows that I do that talk about the interests of People like the economy, population boom, etc. receive a zero-rating. The shows broadcasting fights and drama receive maximum ratings. This is a fault in society. Journalists whose careers are based on these ratings are going to do controversial shows. I being a senior journalist can get away with it, but a young journalist is not going to jeopardize his career.

Is there an alternative to the TRP system in the world?

Yes, I do believe there is, but this is a long debate of impact vs eyeballs. All of these things require resources and money. PEMRA should be focusing on these things. PEMRA should carry out proper research regarding this and let news channels know what sort of content people are interested in or they can benefit from. They should be encouraging the news anchors and journalists to speak up about real and critical issues.

Do you think that social media is an alternative to it?

No, social media comes with a responsibility. It is impacting journalism in an effective way as well, by increasing our sources of information. We carry out fact verification of that information and then broadcast it, we can also debunk the myths regarding certain news that is shown on social media. I do not believe that social media has killed print media. When the radio was invented people claimed that now print media will die gradually. The print has never died, but with time print has transformed into digital print. The mediums of information have changed from newspaper to a mobile phone, but it is very much still there. Print gives you a thorough breakdown of information that a normal news bulletin or a talk show cannot. The role has changed but the impact is still there it is simply different than what it used to be.

