

Journalistic Self-Censorship in Jordan: Influencing Factors and the Role of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the widespread self-censorship among journalists in Jordan and analyses the interplay of key influencing factors involved in news production and whether they can be determined as private or public origin through qualitative interviews with media professionals. The research also uncovers how Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and media policies influence journalistic content and practices. The conducted on-site interviews reveal that journalists often change or withhold content publish – influenced by fear of legal consequences and economic dependence towards different entities in Jordan. The findings highlight that self-censorship is both a response to external threats and the result of internal ethical dilemmas, leading to protocol journalism where reporting is uncritical and aligns with official narratives. The study confirms that SLAPPs are used to suppress freedom of expression and highlights the urgent need for legal reforms to protect journalists and strengthen media independence in Jordan.

Keywords: self-censorship, Jordan, Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)

1 Introduction

In early 2022, during a field trip to Jordan, a local journalist shared insightful experiences of complex dilemmas faced by several media professionals in the region. The person had uncovered credible evidence of misconduct involving a prominent public figure but – as an extensive consequence – chose not to publish the story. The decision was based on a combination of concerns over personal safety and potential repercussions, due to the high-profile nature of those implicated. This incident exemplifies the underlying nature of self-censorship in Jordan, as journalists and media professionals weigh public interest against personal safety and broader societal concerns. The phenomenon of self-censorship illustrated here is therefore multi-causal and extends beyond explicit fear of retribution, encompassing wider ethical considerations and professional responsibilities. As scholars like Cook and Heilmann (2013) and Hanitzsch (2010) have noted, self-censorship involves navigating an array of influences – from personal security to ethical obligations embedded in journalistic media practices. This has also become a central focus in studies on news production and media influence; especially within restrictive media environments such as Jordan.

To thoroughly explore this topic, the paper is structured across several thematic sections. Section 2 discusses the theoretical frameworks surrounding self-censorship; covering fundamental theories like the Spiral of Silence Theory from Noelle-Neumann (1986) and a structured model of self-censorship by Shoemaker and Reese (1996; 2016), which categorizes influences on journalism as professional, procedural, group-based, organizational, economic, and political, including Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (Canan & Pring, 1988; Borg-Barthet et al., 2021; Borrell, 2021). This theoretical foundation is essential for analyzing the complex layers of influence that shape journalistic decisions and self-censorship in restrictive environments such as in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The next section follows with a

41 literature review related to the Jordanian context (AlAshry, 2022, 2023, 2024; Al-Zoubi et al., 2023; Khalil
42 et al., 2023; Ismael, 2023; Mohammad & Ling Loh, 2023; Maghaireh, 2024; Al-Sarayreh, 2024), which
43 includes complementary sources such as reports and policy briefs from non-governmental organizations
44 that examines the current state of media freedom and self-censorship in the country (Amnesty International,
45 2024; BTI, 2024; Freedom House, 2024; Reporters Without Borders, 2024). By contextualizing recent
46 research, this section outlines several constraints that shape journalistic practices. This contextual review
47 sets the stage for understanding the specific pressures that contribute to self-censorship. Section 4
48 introduces the research questions and methodology of the study, with a focus on a qualitative, interview-
49 based approach that captures firsthand insights from Jordanian journalists and media experts. It details the
50 methodological choices, including the semi-structured interview format and ethical considerations inherent
51 in studying self-censorship within restrictive contexts like Jordan (Kvale, 2007; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).
52 The core research questions explore both the factors driving self-censorship and the role of legal
53 mechanisms like SLAPPs in shaping journalistic freedom. The findings are presented in Section 5, which
54 combines interview insights with supporting studies based on similar methodologies (Spies, 2017; AlAshry,
55 2022, 2023, 2024; CDFJ, 2023; Northcutt, 2023; Mohammad & Ling Loh, 2023). This section examines the
56 interplay between public and private self-censorship in Jordan, identifying external constraints, such as
57 organizational policies and legal threats, alongside personal factors, like internalized ethical standards. This
58 section also connects these findings to the theoretical framework introduced in Section 2 and the literature
59 review in Section 3, providing an in-depth analysis of the unique challenges Jordanian journalists and media
60 professionals face in their working context. By synthesizing the findings, Section 6 provides practical
61 recommendations to foster a more open media environment in Jordan (Verza, 2018; Al-Khalidi, 2023;
62 Ismael, 2023; Al-Brim et al., 2024; Al-Sarayreh, 2024; Maghaireh, 2024). Last but not least, Section 7 as
63 conclusion will summarize all findings, key implications, as well as offering an outlook to strengthening
64 media freedom and resilience in Jordan. Through the integration of theoretical insights, the literature review
65 on the status quo, and empirical data based on interviews, this work aims to provide a more nuanced
66 understanding of journalistic self-censorship in Jordan, contributing to the broader discourse on media
67 freedom and the right to information in politically sensitive contexts.

68 **2 Theoretical Framework**

69 The impact of various factors on journalism and media production has been scientifically examined in detail,
70 with particular emphasis on self-censorship as an expression of economic, political or social pressure. This
71 thematic is evident in the works of various scientists from distinct academic fields. Nevertheless, the specific
72 aspect of self-censorship of media professionals remains insufficiently researched both in the global context
73 and specifically in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. As the media and communication scientists Jungblut
74 and Hoxha outline, “[s]elf-censorship can be defined as the individual self-restriction of one’s freedom of
75 speech. Specifically, journalists realize that reporting something would do more harm (to themselves or to
76 others) than good and therefore restrain from covering particular events” (2017, p. 227). Accordingly, the
77 social scientists Cook and Heilmann classify self-censorship into two distinct spheres: public and private
78 (2013, p. 7) – respective internal and external – as the performance of journalists is “[...] an outcome of
79 dynamic negotiations influenced by different internal and external constraints that potentially inhibit, but
80 can also enable the practice of journalism” (Mellado et al., 2016, p. 8). Private self-censorship, on the other
81 hand, is conceptualized as a situation in which the journalist acts both as a censor and as a censored entity.
82 In these situations, journalists absorb and internalize the norms of acceptable reporting, thereby engaging
83 in self-censorship that conforms to these external criteria. On the other hand, private self-censorship is
84 conceptualized as a situation where the journalist acts both as the censoring agent and the censored entity.
85 This form of self-censorship represents an intrapersonal dynamic within an individual, involving a conflict
86 between various internal viewpoints and attitudes, as further described by Cook and Heilmann (2013, p.
87 21). It arises when journalists and media professionals weigh different values, such as the socio-political

88 relevance of a story, against ethical considerations, such as the potential harm a story could cause (Jungblut
89 & Hoxha, 2017, p. 227).

90 The decision by a journalist to refrain from publishing a story is not necessarily a response to actual events
91 or pressures. Therefore, also the differentiation between objective and subjective factors influencing news
92 productions is pivotal, as outlined by Hanitzsch and further authors (2010, p. 19). Objective influences are
93 linked to tangible circumstances, such as financial constraints, which may not always be perceived as
94 significantly impactful by journalists (2010, p. 19). In contrast, as Hanitzsch and Hoxha discuss, subjective
95 influences are those that reside solely within the individual journalist's perception (2014, p. 7).
96 Consequently, the way media professionals perceive objective factors is pivotal in determining their impact
97 on the news production process. This perspective of journalists' personal interpretations and perceptions
98 regarding to the selection and design of media content is also outlined in the work "Mediating the Message
99 in the 21st Century" by Shoemaker and Reese, in which they illustrate four levels of hierarchically
100 influencing factors: (1) socialization and attitudes, (2) media organizations and routines, (3) other social
101 institutions and forces, and (4) ideological positions (1996, pp. 7–8). Consequently, objective influences
102 may not be fully recognized or acknowledged, as also Reich and Hanitzsch argue that "[i]t is important to
103 note that professional autonomy cannot be investigated with regard to its objective nature and quality, only
104 with respect to the way it is perceived by journalists" (2013, p. 136).

105 Furthermore, this individual perception can be also effectively illustrated by using the Spiral of Silence
106 Theory. Originally evolved by the German communication scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1986), the
107 theory suggests that the likelihood of an individual voicing its opinion is influenced by the perception of
108 the prevailing public opinion. In the context of journalism, this implies that media professionals may choose
109 not to publish a story or specific information if they perceive a significant disconnection between their own
110 views or interpretation of an event and what they believe to be the public consensus. The underlying
111 motivation here is often the avoidance of social isolation or professional discord, up to drawbacks.
112 However, it is critical to recognize that a journalist's perception of public opinion may not accurately reflect
113 the actual public sentiment; as this was discussed by the communication scientists Scheufele and Moy (2000,
114 p. 10). Potential misinterpretations by media producers are further amplified when considering Hayes'
115 approach of the spiral of silence theory, which examines the impact of personal fear of isolation on the
116 willingness to report on minority opinions: "As a result, minority voices become increasingly hard to hear
117 when adherents of minority positions do not articulate those positions publicly in the form of televised
118 interviews, public opinion polls, or during interpersonal discussion" (Hayes, 2007, p. 785). Those
119 assumptions are corroborated by Gearhart and Zhang (2014), as well as Neubaum and Krämer (2017), in
120 their researches on the role of social media in shaping perceptions of public opinion. They discovered that
121 the immediacy and visibility of feedback on social media can amplify the spiral of silence effect.
122 Consequently, the dynamic of self-censorship in journalism is closely tied to the interplay between
123 subjectively perceived public opinion and individual decision-making processes.

124 This exploration of the Spiral of Silence's impact on journalistic practices provides a foundation for a deeper
125 analysis of the various factors influencing news production. Building on the four hierarchical levels of
126 influencing factors identified by Shoemaker and Reese (1996), which outline broader social contexts of self-
127 censorship, Hanitzsch and other authors provide a more nuanced examination of factors shaping
128 journalistic news production. Their analysis identifies six fundamental components integral to the process
129 of news production.: (1) political, (2) economic, (3) organizational, (4) procedural, (5) professional, and (6)
130 reference group-based (2010, p. 15). Political self-censorship, is tied to the political environment, including
131 government officials, politicians, but also business people and lobbyists. Hanitzsch and the other authors
132 argue, that "[r]epresenting, advocating, and imposing the interests of business and trade are political acts
133 with political implications" (2010, p. 17). Economic self-censorship, as Hanitzsch the others note, is rooted
134 in the commercial nature of news media and "[...] have direct consequences for news organizations [...]"

135 (2010, p. 17), where stories are evaluated based on their potential impact on profits, advertising interests,
 136 or subscription numbers. Organizational self-censorship arises from the dynamics within media
 137 organizations, including editorial level, up to the managerial level of influences and hierarchies (Shoemaker
 138 & Reese, 1996, pp. 7–8), where a story may be suppressed to align with organizational preferences.
 139 Procedural self-censorship is driven by operational limitations, such as time, resource constraints as well
 140 routinized processes in news production, leading to decisions against reporting certain stories. Professional
 141 influences guide what is seen as good and acceptable practice in journalism by encompassing the policies,
 142 conventions, and standards inside the field and particular newsrooms (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, pp. 17–18).
 143 Although media laws are made and imposed by the political system, journalists often view them through a
 144 pragmatic lens, focusing on the legal boundaries of their work rather than the political implications, thereby
 145 integrating these laws into their standard professional conduct. Reference group-based self-censorship
 146 reflects decisions influenced by anticipated reactions from peers, colleagues, or the audience, aligning partly
 147 with Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence Theory (1986).

148 As explored by the social scientists Cook and Heilmann, self-censorship can be motivated by both public
 149 and private incentives. Subsequently, Jungblut and Hoxha further analyze these incentives through the lens
 150 of Hanitzsch's six factors of news production, as shown in Table 1.

151 **Table 1:** A conceptualization of self-censorship based on origin and motivation (Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017, p. 228).

	Public	Private
Professional	Story is not in line with an officially existing professional code of conduct, media laws, etc.	Story is not in line with personally held professional expectations/claims
Procedural	Story might need too much media resources, e.g., time, money, space	Story might need too much personal resources, e.g., private time, money
Organizational	Story is not in line with the opinion of the owner or supervisor	Story could threaten personal career
Reference group-based	Story is not in line with reference group's opinion	–
Economic	Story might harm the newspaper's financial situation, advertisers or general economy	Story might harm own economic situation
Political/ ideological	Story is not in line with (influential) person's political opinion/ideology; story might harm political processes	Story is not in line with own political opinion/ ideology

152 Furthermore, they recommend that in evaluating the effects of publishing or not publishing a story, as well
 153 as self-censorship, further distinctions should be made with respect to the entities that are impacted: the
 154 individual media producer, including their health, economic status, or social standing, other individuals, like
 155 news sources and the subjects of their reporting, and larger entities, like the news organization as a whole
 156 or the general public (Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017, p. 229).

157 The delineation of self-censorship types, whether influenced by hierarchical factors as discussed by
 158 Shoemaker and Reese or by news production dynamics outlined by Hanitzsch and the other authors, lays
 159 the foundation for a more in-depth discussion on legal mechanisms impacting journalistic behavior. Such
 160 legal dimensions will be particularly important for the later analysis of interviews in the context of Jordan.

161 One significant legal mechanism is the use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).
162 Consequently, SLAPPs are legal actions used to discourage journalists from exercising their freedom of
163 expression on public interest matters (Borg-Barthet et al., 2021; Bonello Ghio & Nasreddin, 2022). These
164 lawsuits operate within the framework at what Shoemaker and Reese define as ‘social institutions forces’
165 (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 95–129), where influences from outside the news organization, such as
166 governments, businesses, and other powerful entities, exert control. The concept also aligns with
167 Hanitzsch’s framework, which acknowledges various public factors that can impact how journalists produce
168 content, including legal pressures and the broader social and institutional environment in which media
169 operates. The overarching aim of a SLAPP, according to Jack B. Harrison, Professor of Law at Northern
170 Kentucky University, “[...] is not to win on the merits, but rather to discourage the defendant from
171 exercising their right to free speech by threatening excessively expensive litigation” (2020, p. 1253). Beyond
172 legal ramifications, SLAPPs also have extra-legal consequences such as “[...] the personal costs of
173 psychological trauma and of undermined belief in political participation, the ripple effect on other citizens’
174 political involvement, and the diversion of resources from the original issue in dispute” (1988, p. 390), as
175 described by the sociologist Penelope Canan and the jurist George Pring.

176 3 Literature Review in the Jordanian Context

177 In theory, Jordan’s constitution guarantees its citizens freedom of expression (see unofficial translation of
178 the constitution of Jordan: *The Right of Peaceful Assembly*, 2011). Article 15 states that everyone has the
179 right to express their opinion freely ‘within the limits of the law’. However, these legally guaranteed
180 freedoms are significantly undermined by restrictive laws that impose broad and vague restrictions on
181 freedom of expression, including access to information – particularly for activists, journalists, and the media
182 in general (BTI, 2024). The conditional nature of this freedom ‘within the limits of the law’ provides the
183 state with a legal basis to impose significant restrictions that allow state authorities to criminalize critical
184 speech towards the monarchy and state institutions, religious affairs, foreign relations, and content deemed
185 harmful to the national unity. Consequently, this constitutional right remains largely symbolic, as the
186 boundaries of ‘acceptable’ expression are narrowly defined and strictly enforced, putting journalists and
187 media professionals in a precarious position of constantly facing legal consequences for critical reporting.

188 Jordan’s juridical landscape is characterized by a number of laws and regulations specifically targeting
189 journalistic freedom – including the Penal Code, the Cybercrime Law, the Anti-Terrorism Law, and other
190 laws criminalizing defamation, blasphemy, and criticism of the government, public authorities, as well as
191 the royal family. The wording of these laws seems to be intentionally ambiguous and gives authorities
192 considerable scope for interpretation, which can suppress dissenting opinions. For example, under the
193 Penal Code, any content deemed defamatory or harmful regarding the ‘national unity’ can be prosecuted,
194 with journalists and media professionals facing fines, prison sentences, or other punitive measures.
195 Furthermore, Article 195 significantly restricts journalistic freedom, particularly through the criminalization
196 of criticism against the royal family. The Cybercrime Law, revised in 2023, has expanded the state’s
197 influence in the digital space, now targeting not only journalists but also the broader online community (Al-
198 Sarayreh, 2024; Maghaireh, 2024). First enacted in 2015 and amended in August 2023 under pressure from
199 King Abdullah II despite initial concerns about freedom of expression from the parliament, the revised law
200 reflects the government’s focus on tightening digital regulations in response to new cyber threats (JOSA,
201 2023). According to this, it has further increased penalties by criminalizing online speech deemed as ‘false’
202 or ‘provocative’ and providing for fines and prison sentences for journalists who publish content the state
203 deems undermining public order (Freedom House, 2024). For example, the minimum prison sentence for
204 cyber trespass has been increased by twelve times and fines by five times (Maghaireh, 2024, p. 26). Penalties
205 are now up to five years in prison and fines of up to 75,000 Jordanian Dinar (JD) for serious offenses
206 (Maghaireh, 2024, p. 26). This is substantial in a country where the average monthly income is around 600
207 JD (World Bank, 2023). Journalists face additional risks under the Cybercrime Law 2023, as it also

208 criminalizes acts such as unauthorized disclosure of officials' personal information, or cyber defamation
209 and spreading rumors, without clearly defining these offences (CDFJ, 2023, pp. 34–44; AlAshry, 2024, p.
210 63). These changes underscore the growing tension between cybersecurity and press freedom in Jordan. It
211 also creates an environment in which self-censorship is omnipresent due to strategic lawsuits, as journalists
212 and media professionals often preemptively maneuver around reporting on controversial topics to avoid
213 possible legal consequences. Article 17 of the law, for example, prohibits the publication of content that
214 could provoke societal conflict, and international social media platforms with over 100,000 users in Jordan
215 are now obligated to establish local offices and to comply with Jordanian law (Freedom House, 2024). This
216 provision allows the state to apply national censorship policies to global platforms, thereby restricting the
217 digital space for independent voices (Maghaireh, 2024, p. 20). Platforms that do not comply face penalties
218 such as advertising bans and bandwidth restrictions, increasing the pressure on these companies to comply
219 with governmental standards for acceptable content (Freedom House, 2024). As a result, social media
220 platforms, for example, which once provided a relatively free environment for expression, are increasingly
221 subject to the same restrictions as traditional media – leaving journalists and media professionals with fewer
222 opportunities to access information to circumvent governmental censorship (Al-Sarayreh, 2024, p. 349;
223 Maghaireh, 2024, p. 33). In addition to legal pressure, Jordanian journalists are under extensive government
224 surveillance, further restricting freedom of expression (Khalil et al., 2023; AlAshry, 2022, 2023, 2024). The
225 Telecommunications Law requires tele-communication companies to enable government surveillance of
226 private communications, allowing authorities to track phone calls and monitor online activities of
227 individuals deemed to be a threat (Freedom House, 2024). This surveillance infrastructure is supported by
228 the reported use of Pegasus spyware, which was used to hack the devices of journalists, activists and lawyers
229 between 2019 and 2023 (2024). Consequently, this intrusive surveillance has created a climate of fear –
230 many journalists and media professionals believe that their communications are under scrutiny, significantly
231 affecting their willingness to conduct investigative reporting or criticize sensitive issues. As a result, self-
232 censorship is widely spread; journalists and media professionals avoid publishing stories that might be
233 subject to government scrutiny, thereby contributing to a limited public debate in which controversial issues
234 often go unreported.

235 The control over the media is reinforced through direct and indirect government intervention; this includes
236 the appointment of editors, the management of financial resources, and the imposition of news blackouts
237 that prevent coverage of certain topics (Freedom House, 2024). State influence was particularly evident, for
238 example, during the alleged coup attempt in 2021 involving Prince Hamzah bin al-Hussein, the half-brother
239 of King Abdullah II, when authorities immediately imposed news blackouts to control and restrict media
240 coverage. Jordanian media were banned from publicly discussing and reporting on details of the alleged
241 plot, underscoring how news blackouts are used as a tool to suppress politically sensitive stories in Jordan
242 (Mohammad & Ling Loh, 2023, p. 142; BTI, 2024). State control also extends to financial manipulation, as
243 media outlets that rely on state support are under pressure to meet government expectations, leaving little
244 room for independent reporting. The lack of financial autonomy makes it difficult for the Jordanian media
245 to operate as an independent entity. This dependence on state funding reinforces a culture of subordination
246 and silence on issues critical to government interests. The diversity of perspectives in Jordan's media
247 landscape is further limited by formal and informal pressures on journalists and media organizations.
248 Despite the existence of diverse media outlets – including state-run and private publications, secular and
249 religious newspapers, and satellite channels – the scope for genuine media pluralism is limited. State
250 authorities have the power to block websites and revoke licenses by forcing news organizations to comply
251 with restrictive regulations or risk closure and therefore also a loss of employment for journalists and media
252 professionals (BTI, 2024). The satirical news site Al Hudood (Fengler et al., 2021, p. 73), banned in 2023,
253 is an example of the limitations placed on independent media, as authorities are quick to suppress voices
254 that deviate from the official narrative (Freedom House, 2024). This control has led many journalists and
255 media professionals to abandon critical reporting; altogether contributing to a media environment in which

256 self-censorship becomes a means of survival. The chilling effect of such restrictions is palpable (Townend,
257 2017), as journalists constantly weigh the potential impact of their work against the need to maintain their
258 professional integrity.

259 Individual journalists who challenge these restrictions often face harassment, arrest, and trial. Under
260 COVID-19-related legislation, journalists and media professionals faced harsh limitations in Jordan. The
261 Cabinet halted the publication of all newspapers for two weeks in March 2020. In an ambiguously phrased
262 directive, the government prohibited the dissemination of information about the outbreak that might ‘cause
263 panic’. For covering the ongoing epidemic, four journalists were jailed in Jordan (AlAshry, 2022). Beginning
264 in 2011 during the Arab Spring, the grassroots alliance known as the ‘Hirak’ movement in Jordan advocates
265 for political change, anti-corruption policies, and economic fairness. Containing young people, activists,
266 and tribal leaders, it calls attention to governmental corruption and economic suffering. Due to
267 demonstrations and social media posts with regard on unclear legal justifications in the Penal Code, but
268 also the planned revision of the Cybercrime Law, as well as widespread cost-of-living protests, the
269 government responded in December 2022 with increased raids and arrested hundreds of participants during
270 demonstrations, including journalists and media professionals (Freedom House, 2024). Under this vaguely-
271 defined Cybercrime Law, four media practitioners have already been unfairly convicted; this leaves too
272 much to the interpretation of judges, as the non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders
273 outlines (2024). High-profile cases such as those of Nour Haddad, Khairuddin al-Jabri , Ahmad Hassan al-
274 Zoubi and Hiba Abu Taha demonstrate the state's harsh response to journalistic dissent (Amnesty
275 International, 2024; BTI, 2024; Reporters Without Borders, 2024). In December 2023, according to
276 Reporters Without Borders, freelance journalist Nour Haddad was arrested for a week and fined 5,000 JD
277 for defaming a state official and publishing false information endangering national security (2024). The fee
278 was canceled in March 2024 as part of an amnesty statute. Khairuddin al-Jabri, another freelance journalist,
279 was jailed for a week in March 2024 after distributing an internet video critical with regard of the Gaza
280 conflict. He was charged with inciting dissension and defaming a public official under the Cybercrime Law.
281 Al-Zoubi, a satirical columnist, was sentenced to one year in prison for ‘provoking unrest’ for posting
282 critical content about the government on social media. Abu Taha faced a similar sentence for an article
283 about Jordan’s interception of Iranian missiles heading to Israel in April 2024. These cases underscore the
284 risks journalists and media professionals face in the Kingdom, where even moderate criticism of
285 governmental policies or actions can lead to imprisonment. The judicial system’s broad interpretation of
286 restriction laws according to the right of freedom of expression and selective enforcement of those laws
287 have made journalism in Jordan a high-risk profession in which individuals can be prosecuted not only for
288 their published work but also for personal statements and public participation made online. Furthermore,
289 the Jordanian cybercrime legislation has caused some media professionals challenges to their coverage. Two
290 photojournalists, Charles Dessi and Abdul Jabbar Zeitoun, were detained in March 2024 covering protests
291 in Amman against the war in Gaza; Zeitoun was jailed for a week while Dessi was kept for over a month.
292 Synne Bjerkestrand, a Norwegian freelancer journalist covering demonstrations, experienced police
293 harassment in April 2024 (Reporters Without Borders, 2024).

294 Although the Jordanian constitution ostensibly supports freedom of expression, this right is largely
295 theoretical due to the cumulative effect of restrictive laws, administrative control, and state surveillance.
296 Journalists and media professionals in Jordan – being under strong legal and social pressure – are limited
297 in their ability to fulfill their role as independent oversight bodies (AlAshry, 2024, p. 61). The state uses a
298 range of legal tactics, including strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), to intimidate
299 journalists and deter them from reporting on sensitive issues (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Borg-Barthet et
300 al., 2021; Bonello Ghio & Nasreddin, 2022), further reinforcing the chilling effect that permeates the media
301 landscape (Townend, 2017). The spiral of silence phenomenon is also evident as both journalists and
302 citizens refrain from openly expressing dissenting opinions for fear of legal consequences or social
303 ostracism (Scheufle & Moy, 2000; Hayes, 2007, p. 785; Gearhart & Zhang, 2014; Neubaum & Krämer,

2017). The interplay between constitutional guarantees and restrictive laws reflects a complex dynamic in which the state's obligation to maintain public order and protect national interests often takes precedence over the individual's right to freedom of expression and information. The result is an (over-)regulated media landscape in which there is little room for dissent and the costs of challenging authority are enormous. In further consequence, it suppresses democratic engagement and limits public discourse. Jordan's regulative media landscape not only restricts journalistic freedom but also curtails the public's access to unbiased information. This raises concerns about the long-term impact on democratic principles and public participation – especially also in the digital sphere (Alodat et al., 2023; Taweel, 2023).

4 Research Questions and Methodological Framework

The existing literature on self-censorship in journalism primarily focuses on individual, professional, and organizational influences, as well as the impact of legal mechanisms like SLAPPs in regions with more free media laws. However, there is a significant gap in understanding how these factors interplay in the context of Jordan; particularly regarding on how local journalists navigate these pressures. The current study aims to fill this gap by analyzing interviews with Jordanian journalists and media experts to uncover the unique challenges they face, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of self-censorship and legal influences in regions with less free media systems such as Jordan.

Consequently, the study is guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the primary factors influencing self-censorship among journalists in Jordan, and how do hierarchical, as well as private and public dynamics play a role?

Research Question 2: How do Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) impact the journalistic behavior and freedom of expression of media professionals in Jordan?

To examine the dynamics of self-censorship in the Jordanian media sector, this study employed a qualitative research method, utilizing findings from semi-structured interviews. This approach provides the necessary flexibility for in-depth discussions; enabling a comprehensive investigation of the underlying factors and driving forces shaping self-censorship among media professionals in Jordan. The semi-structured interviews, conducted in May 2022, serve as the primary data source, facilitating an in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perceptions while contextualizing them with other sources. The value of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research lies in their conversational nature and ability to delve into complex issues (Kvale, 2007, pp. 11–15; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 57–60). Originally developed as part of the PhD research project on impactful storytelling and conflict-sensitive media work in Jordan and Lebanon, the interviews in Jordan revealed a significant gap in the understanding and practice of conflict-sensitive reporting compared to Lebanon. Instead, the interviews increasingly emphasized the importance of media freedom and the prevalence of journalistic self-censorship in Jordan, which became a major focus of this analysis. Interviewees were selected for their professional experience in the field of media (development) work in Jordan and their ability to provide comprehensive, nuanced perspectives on reporting principles and practices on the ground. The group, consisting of three journalists and two media NGO experts, was chosen for their capacity to articulate informed viewpoints in English, thus contributing valuable insights and diversity to the research (Patton, 2015, pp. 398–400). In order to maintain the interviewees from legal, professional and financial consequences, protecting the identity of the interviewees by anonymizing the interview quotes was the most important priority and, last but not least, also corresponds to compliance with ethical standards in journalism and science (Harcup, 2009, p. 173).

Although the sample size of three journalists and two media professionals limits the direct generalizability of the findings, it is nevertheless well suited to examine the nuanced self-censorship practices in the

349 Jordanian media landscape. The qualitative depth of the semi-structured interviews provides valuable
350 insights and captures the complexities faced by media professionals in restrictive environments such as
351 Jordan. To strengthen the robustness of the study and place its findings within a broader and more
352 generalizable media context in Jordan, additional literature was integrated. This includes previous studies
353 based on interviews with Jordanian journalists (Spies, 2017; Lewis & Nashmi, 2019; Al-Zoubi et al., 2023;
354 Ismael, 2023; AlAshry, 2022, 2023, 2024), as well as complementary sources such as reports and policy
355 briefs from non-governmental organizations (CDFJ, 2023; Amnesty International, 2024; BTI, 2024;
356 Freedom House, 2024; Reporters Without Borders, 2024). These resources corroborate and contextualize
357 the primary data and increase the credibility and relevance of the study's results and conclusions.

358 **5 Findings**

359 Throughout their careers, almost every journalist in Jordan engages in self-censorship, mainly due to
360 concerns associated with political and economic pressures and the absence of distinct ethical guidelines. In
361 exploring the research question, all interviewees disclosed that they had either modified or completely
362 omitted stories, although these being of clear public interest. This practice highlights a pervasive nature of
363 self-censorship among journalists and media professionals, who are routinely subjected to a variety of
364 internal and external pressures. Nearly all interviewees identified fear as the primary catalyst for self-
365 censorship, characterizing it as a condition where journalists are aware of the truth but are constrained from
366 expressing it. Concerning this as the primary factors influencing self-censorship among journalists in
367 Jordan, and examining the role of hierarchical, private, and public dynamics, the investigation reveals a
368 multifaceted landscape of self-censorship driven by a combination of internal media policies, external
369 political pressures, and socio-economic factors. According to the annual report on the state of media
370 freedom in Jordan in 2022 by the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ), a non-profit civil
371 society organization (CSO) founded in the Jordanian capital Amman in 1998, alarming 53.8% of journalists
372 consequently said that they are highly terrified of freely doing their work owing to possible breaches
373 impacting their personal safety or job security, revealing the deep-seated fear that shapes journalistic
374 expression in Jordan (2023, p. 10).

375 In Jordan's professional media sphere, systemic issues significantly impact journalistic practices, highlighted
376 by "[...] frequent encounters with hate speech in major newspapers" (media expert 2, personal
377 communication, May 24, 2022) due to specific self-censored or softened news content by media
378 professionals, which underscore failures in upholding professional and ethical standards. This trend is
379 consistent with Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchical model of factors of influence on journalism, which
380 includes external social entities, such as the audience, that directly affect journalistic freedom (Shoemaker
381 & Reese, 1996). The statement by the media expert 2, which can be categorized in Jungblut and Hoxha's
382 scheme on the organizational and reference group-based level and therefore in the public sphere, also aligns
383 with the CDFJ report, which notes that 48% of reporters admitted to editorial department censorship – a
384 major internal restriction that not only inhibits journalistic independence but also hinders public access to
385 a range of opinions (CDFJ, 2023, p. 9). Nevertheless, such issues often lead also to self-censorship on the
386 private professional, procedural and organizational level, particularly when journalists encounter stories that
387 fail to meet their personal criteria for quality, their news values and resources, as well as due to a sense of
388 threatening their personal career. Such decisions reflect a deep-rooted conflict between journalists'
389 professional obligations and their personal ethical standards; including compelling them to withhold stories
390 that do not align with their expectations. Moreover, efforts are being made to address these challenges
391 through education. One counter-initiative involves training journalists and media workers to handle
392 sensitive topics more adeptly; aiming to enhance their ability to navigate complex issues without
393 compromising journalistic integrity. "I've been training journalists on how to handle this type of issue"
394 (journalist 1, personal communication, May 25, 2022), mentions one interviewee, indicating proactive steps
395 being taken to improve reporting standards and reduce the need for self-censorship. These efforts are part

396 of a broader attempt to strengthen the capacity of Jordanian journalists to produce insightful and
397 responsible news content in a restrictive media environment.

398 In the same CDFJ report, 47.6% of journalists stated that government containment strategies significantly
399 impact activities of media organizations, encouraging economic and organizational self-censorship (2023,
400 p. 10). These private and public restrictions force journalists to adapt their content and ensure that it does
401 not contradict institutional guidelines; while at the same time maintaining their professional reputation.
402 Shoemaker and Reese's concept clearly applies here, as these pressures result from organizational routines
403 and economic imperatives will be transmitted to the individuals (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). This
404 environment is compounded by the media organizations' dependency on advertising revenue and external
405 financial support, fostering a climate of self-censorship as journalists fear repercussions from advertisers or
406 influential economic or governmental figures often involved in media organizations (cf.: journalist 1,
407 personal communication, May 25, 2022). Furthermore, the drive to commercialize news often prioritizes
408 profitability over journalistic integrity, leading to diluted content quality. Journalists and media professionals
409 therefore find themselves in a precarious balance between creating engaging content and ensuring the
410 economic viability of their organizations. Strict adherence to organizational boundaries is emphasized, with
411 journalists often instructed to remove content from platforms like Twitter, showcasing the significant
412 editorial control exerted over their work: "They called me and asked me to delete these statements from
413 my Twitter" (media expert 2, personal communication, May 24, 2022). In addition, as a result of numerous
414 amendments to the Press and Publications Law, news and social media websites have been censored, and
415 journalists and bloggers have been arrested and detained for their posts under the Cybercrime Law, as
416 AlAshry explains (2024, p. 67). This editorial control contributes to a loss of journalistic identity, as
417 encapsulated by one journalist's lament, "[w]e've made mistake after mistake until we've lost our identity"
418 (media expert 2, personal communication, May 24, 2022), reflecting the profound impact of organizational
419 and economic constraints on journalistic autonomy and expression in Jordan (Al-Zoubi et al., 2023).
420 Furthermore, Samuel Spies explains that self-censorship in Jordan is developed through practical experience
421 rather than through formal training in media law and ethics. New journalists learn the profession's 'red
422 lines' through subtle cues and repeated editorial rejections, which leads them to internalize these constraints
423 over time (Spies, 2017, pp. 118–119).

424 In the Jordanian media landscape, public and private self-censorship prominently emerges, tightly woven
425 with the interplay between politics and journalism (Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017, p. 228). According to this,
426 42.4% of journalists say that executive authorities and its security apparatus intervene heavily with media
427 operations, which exacerbates public political self-censorship (CDFJ, 2023, p. 8). This predominant form
428 of self-censorship sees journalists often omitting or altering stories to conform to the political leanings of
429 governmental pressures, profoundly shaping public discourse. This climate, echoed by 48.6% of journalists
430 who believe the access to information from governmental entities is inefficient, reflects a media milieu in
431 which delicate political matters are frequently overlooked (CDFJ, 2023). Therefore, journalists in Jordan
432 often encounter predicaments when addressing topics that might clash with the interests of the broader
433 political environment, including public authorities. This leads to critical investigative stories about political
434 corruption, economic scandals, or illicit government actions being downplayed or outright ignored. As
435 journalists navigate these treacherous waters, they are also acutely aware of the economic ties that bind their
436 outlets to political entities through governmental advertising revenues or financial support. This
437 intertwining of economic dependency and journalistic practice is exemplified by the handling of sensitive
438 topics such as national security. For instance, a journalist discussed the strategic decision to withhold their
439 own name when reporting on delicate issues: "I have to have my own censorship [...]. So sometimes I
440 could write a very good report, but I will never put my name. Because if I put my name, I may be, like, near
441 him in the jail [...]" (Spies, 2017, p. 173). This quote highlights the perceived consequences of being publicly
442 associated with controversial reports. Further compounding the atmosphere of fear and caution, journalists
443 express concerns about repercussions that extend beyond personal safety to professional ostracization: "I

444 feared they were going to imprison us simply because of our statements. It relates to law enforcement,
445 freedom, and the politically charged environment in our country” (journalist 2, personal communication,
446 May 25, 2022). This fear fuels a pervasive distrust between journalists and the authorities, leading to a
447 situation where “[t]he journalists don’t trust anyone” and “[t]hey [don’t] complain to the authorities; they
448 don't want to record their violations and keep it silent” (media expert 1, personal communication, May 19,
449 2022). In this regard, self-censorship leads to avoid talking about certain issues – especially in the political
450 sphere. This environment of suspicion and self-restraint encourages a form of journalism heavily reliant on
451 protocol journalism (Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017, p. 234), documenting official statements without critical
452 inquiry, which is seen as a negative form of media coverage. The result is a landscape where the journalistic
453 mission is significantly diluted, reducing its role to mere transcription and avoiding necessary scrutiny of
454 power. The state’s manipulation of media narratives extends to controlling public perceptions on
455 international matters, knowing well the points of international scrutiny, as “[t]hey are smart because they
456 know when the international community pays attention to the direct and clear violations” (media expert 1,
457 personal communication, May 19, 2022). This selective censorship illustrates a sophisticated manipulation
458 of international perceptions and internal narrative control. Such extensive manipulation and control over
459 media narratives in Jordan underline a deeply embedded political censorship system, compelling journalists
460 to navigate a complex array of political sensitivities and economic pressures. This tangled web not only
461 stifles journalistic freedom but also significantly undermines the integrity and quality of news production,
462 shaping public participation and discourse in profound ways.

463 The research findings also align with the Spiral of Silence theory by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, revealing
464 that Jordanian journalists often avoid covering politically and ideologically sensitive topics. This avoidance
465 aims to align with perceived governmental and societal expectations, thereby circumventing potential
466 backlash – a pattern observed and discussed by Scheufele and Moy (2000, p. 10). Supported by Hayes and
467 Neubaum & Krämer, the pervasive self-censorship noted in Jordanian media is deeply rooted in fears of
468 professional isolation and risks, as also described in the beginning of this section, significantly shaping the
469 media agenda (2017). Jordanian journalists echo this sentiment, as noted by one interviewee who remarked,
470 “I feared they were going to imprison us simply because of our statements” (journalist 2, personal
471 communication, May 25, 2022, p. 2). This mistrust causes self-censorship among reporters who hide critical
472 opinions to protect their career and safety (Hanitzsch et al., 2010). Based on CDFJ data, 58.1% of reporters
473 feel that court rulings prohibiting publication greatly restrict media freedom, therefore encouraging self-
474 censorship (2023, p. 11). The researchers also note that such alignments may not accurately reflect the true
475 political and societal landscapes, which could skew the media narrative. This link is essential, as it reflects
476 the internalized constraints that integrates into the everyday decision-making of journalists facing persistent
477 explicit and implicit threats. This form of self-censorship not only suppresses individual expression but also
478 restricts public discourse, thereby intensifying the influence of perceived public opinion on journalistic
479 practices within Jordan.

480 In alignment with the public political sphere, previously discussed, Strategic Lawsuits Against Public
481 Participation (SLAPPs) have a significant impact on journalistic practices and freedom of expression (Borg-
482 Barthet et al., 2021; Bonello Ghio & Nasreddin, 2022). SLAPPs are used in Jordan by powerful entities to
483 suppress undesirable media coverage, especially concerning sensitive public interest matters. These lawsuits
484 create an environment fraught with legal challenges that discourage journalists from engaging in their
485 professional duties freely and fearlessly. According to the CDFJ report, 57.7% of journalists feel that the
486 Jordanian government and legislators does not aggressively preserve media freedom or hold officials
487 accountable for interference. This demonstrates how SLAPPs and legal constraints foster a culture of
488 silence (2023, p. 8). These lawsuits serve therefore as a tactic to silence critical media voices, therefore
489 discouraging journalists and media professionals from reporting delicate subjects out of concern about
490 expensive legal fights. Jordan’s complex legal framework, referred to by a source as having “[...] like 12
491 different laws” (journalist 1, personal communication, May 25, 2022), complicates the media landscape

492 significantly, impacting journalistic freedom and fostering a climate of public and private self-censorship.
493 Journalists are often pressured under these laws, not because they misunderstand them, but because the
494 laws are wielded to exert pressure and distract from critical issues. The CDFJ emphasizes these issues,
495 pointing out that self-censorship remains common as journalists negotiate a climate where public criticism
496 may result in punitive legal action (CDFJ, 2023). This reflects a broader strategy of control where the
497 government uses legal intricacies to manage media narratives and suppress dissent. High-profile cases like
498 the arrest of journalists and media professionals within the last three years, described in section 3, for
499 opposing the ruling system, and the arrest of activists for inciting anti-regime sentiments under the new
500 Cybercrime Law from 2023, illustrate the direct use of legal actions to silence critical voices and enforce
501 political stability (Northcutt, 2023, p. 28). In addition, Miral Sabry AlAshry outlines in her research, that
502 one interviewed journalist stated that Jordan has features of an authoritarian media system, and they control
503 the state through the government's Ministry of Information by using the Press and Publications Law (PPL),
504 which underwent extensive modification by parliamentarians, to control press freedom and autonomy
505 (2022, p. 7). These laws are part of an extensive system designed to suppress political dissent and manage
506 the narrative around the monarchy's stability; showcasing the government's broad strategy to control public
507 discourse. The case of Prince Hamzah bin al-Hussein highlights the internal political tensions and the
508 measures taken by the Jordanian government to maintain control (Mohammad & Ling Loh, 2023, p. 142;
509 BTI, 2024). Accused of plotting against King Abdullah II, Prince Hamzah's situation was quickly enveloped
510 in secrecy following a gag order from the public prosecutor, which prohibited any media coverage on the
511 matter, mentioned by one of the interviewed media experts (media expert 1, personal communication, May
512 19, 2022). One of AlAshry's interviewees elaborates further, that journalists have been assassinated for
513 reporting on royal matters, such as corruption, often after receiving death threats. She continues that this
514 has led to self-censorship in the journalistic landscape, as many instances were never fully investigated; and
515 too few investigations resulted in judicial charges or convictions (2023, p. 11). The incidents described are
516 a clear illustration of how SLAPPs and similar legal pressures serve to shield the royal family from scrutiny
517 and criticism, further cementing the self-censorship that permeates Jordanian media. Media outlets –
518 including international ones – operate under these constrained circumstances, which often leads to self-
519 censorship with regard on sensitive political topics. Such an environment poses significant challenges for
520 journalists and media outlets who must maintain their editorial independence and journalistic integrity while
521 navigating the legal and political landscape dominated by the government and/or the royal family. This
522 widespread self-censorship also reflects tendencies seen in other countries with restrictive media settings,
523 such as Morocco, Egypt or Turkey, where official involvement and SLAPPs including journalists and media
524 professionals shape media narratives to prevent criticism (Khalil et al., 2023; Jebril & Abunajela, 2024).

525 This examination of the Jordanian media landscape through professional, organizational, procedural,
526 economic, and political lenses reveal a complex matrix of forces that shape journalistic practices. The
527 widespread self-censorship among journalists and media professionals in the Kingdom is strongly
528 influenced by these interrelated factors, which deepen the understanding of how media content and
529 journalistic freedom are shaped in the country. Furthermore, it turns out that the majority of cases of self-
530 censorship reported by journalists are due to external pressure, which again suggests that public self-
531 censorship is more common than private self-censorship. This trend may be due to the interview
532 methodology, where journalists were hesitant to disclose personal biases that influence their work. For
533 example, 43.8% of journalists indicated that governmental censorship, often interlinked with SLAPPs, had
534 a direct impact on their work, demonstrating the widespread prevalence of self-censorship, which can be
535 still driven by both public and private constraints (CDFJ, 2023, p. 10). Nonetheless, the applied framework
536 successfully categorizes and contrasts various forms of self-censorship, demonstrating its effectiveness in
537 analyzing the nuanced dynamics of media operation in Jordan. Journalists navigate the conflict between
538 public and private self-censorship in different ways. For instance, one writer acknowledged withholding a
539 byline on controversial themes to safeguard personal safety but also political, economic and professional

540 constraints, demonstrating a deliberate difference between private self-censorship for safety and public self-
541 censorship due to external constraints (journalist 2, personal communication, May 25, 2022). This duality
542 is consistent with Cook and Heilmann's definition of self-censorship (2013), in which journalists serve as
543 both censors and censored entities. The decision to withhold news coverage therefore frequently combines
544 internal and external factors, forming a united force that influences editorial decisions. However, it could
545 not be clearly proven whether journalists and media professionals are aware of these dualisms of being
546 censors and censored. Nevertheless, this combination of public and private self-censorship demonstrates
547 the inseparability of personal ethics and institutional forces in Jordan's media environment.

548 Especially SLAPPs are indeed a critical tool for suppressing media freedom in Jordan. The fear instilled by
549 these actions is corroborated by journalists' own statements about the dangers of imprisonment for critical
550 reporting and the restrictive oversight by government and intelligence agencies (journalist 2, personal
551 communication, May 25, 2022; journalist 3, personal communication, May 28, 2022). Globally, SLAPPs are
552 recognized as having a chilling effect on free speech and media freedom by intimidating journalists and
553 curtailing public debate (Townend, 2017, p. 2). This chilling effect occurs as journalists, fearing the prospect
554 of costly and prolonged legal battles, choose to self-censor, thus limiting the public's access to important
555 information. The pervasive fear among Jordanian journalists, evidenced by the considerable percentage
556 concerned about their safety and job security, underscores the profound impact of these strategic lawsuits.
557 According to CDFJ, these concerns are well-documented (2023). Such an environment not only threatens
558 individual journalists but also diminishes media diversity and hampers the effective implementation of laws
559 that ensure public access to information. In conclusion, self-censorship occurs across all levels within the
560 self-censorship matrix developed by Jungblut and Hoxha (2017), spanning from professional to political
561 domains. This phenomenon manifests in both private and public contexts, illustrating the comprehensive
562 impact of self-censorship mechanisms on journalistic practices in Jordan. On the political level, SLAPPs
563 seem to serve as the most powerful suppressive mechanism against journalistic freedom in Jordan,
564 consequently affecting all levels of the matrix. This finding highlights the need for legal reforms to protect
565 journalists and ensure a freer press, capable of fulfilling its essential role in society without undue
566 interference or intimidation.

567 **6 Practical Recommendations**

568 In terms of practical recommendations, legislative reforms are needed to protect journalists and media
569 workers from legal intimidation methods – particularly such as SLAPPs at the political-ideological level –
570 and to create clearer rules for freedom of expression. Jordan could also consider adopting anti-SLAPPs
571 laws, modeled on frameworks used in the US, Canada and Australia, to provide legal protection against
572 arbitrary lawsuits aimed at silencing critical media coverage (Verza, 2018). Furthermore, Jordanian
573 legislators should examine current acts like the Cybercrime Law from 2023 to ensure conformity with
574 international human rights norms (Al-Khalidi, 2023; Maghaireh, 2024), notably the International Covenant
575 on Civil and Political Rights, to which Jordan is a signatory (Al-Brim et al., 2024, p. 1).

576 Another essential recommendation is the establishment of enhanced journalistic training programs focusing
577 on media law and ethics as well as data journalism, with particular attention to building resilience against
578 external pressures. According to Lewis and Nashmi, 91% of Jordanian journalists cited data journalism as
579 a critical training need, which could strengthen their ability to present unbiased, evidence-based stories
580 (2019, p. 1). These training programs should be complemented by guidelines for ethical social media use to
581 reduce the risks of dismissal or legal repercussions tied to online reporting, supportively developed by
582 national and international civil society organizations specialized in media freedom in Jordan (Ismael, 2023).
583 Furthermore, to support sustainable change in press freedom, it is essential to conduct training programs
584 for Jordanian authorities and legislators that emphasize the importance of independent media as a pillar of
585 a democratic society. These training programs could cover international standards on freedom of
586 expression, the role of the media in holding those in power accountable, and the long-term sociopolitical

587 and economic benefits of protecting press freedom. In addition, specialized workshops could provide
588 legislators with the knowledge needed to develop balanced laws that both combat legitimate threats such
589 as cybercrime and protect fundamental rights, thus creating a more transparent and accountable legal
590 framework for media practices (Al-Sarayreh, 2024, p. 349). In addition, national and international
591 engagement and cooperation with civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations can
592 strengthen efforts to protect media freedom in Jordan. Intensifying partnerships with international media
593 ‘watchdogs’ and human rights organizations could pressure Jordan’s royal family, the government and its
594 authorities to commit to transparency and uphold journalistic protections. This approach not only aids
595 Jordanian media professionals but also contributes to a better public discourse and last but not least a
596 regional movement towards strengthening free expression and journalistic integrity in similarly restrictive
597 environments, such as the mentioned countries above.

598 **7 Conclusions**

599 This study investigated the complex dynamics of self-censorship in the Jordanian media environment,
600 which are determined by intersecting professional, procedural, organizational, economic, and political
601 limitations. The findings highlighted the critical need for more research on the everyday practices and
602 decision-making processes of Jordanian journalists and media professionals, who face both external threats
603 and internalized restraints that restrict their reporting. Future studies should further integrate qualitative
604 and ethnographic investigations, as well as in-depth quantitative data, to better portray Jordan’s
605 multifaceted realities of self-censorship. Comparative studies in similar socio-political circumstances would
606 position Jordan into a broader regional framework of regulated media landscapes. To promote a more open
607 media landscape, several key recommendations emerge. Legal reforms are required to safeguard journalists
608 and media professionals from intimidation methods such as SLAPPs and to define the boundaries of free
609 speech. Improved training programs in media law, ethics, and data journalism would help journalists and
610 media workers to better withstand external criticism and maintain professional standards. Equally crucial
611 are training programs for Jordanian officials, which should highlight the significance of independent media
612 in a democratic society and familiarize them with international press freedom norms. Increased
613 collaboration with the civil society and international media organizations could provide further
614 opportunities to enhance accountability and transparency. These collaborations may put the required
615 pressure on the government and the royal family to keep their media freedom promises, benefiting
616 Jordanian journalists and media professionals while also promoting a larger regional free speech movement.
617 To summarize, combating self-censorship in Jordan’s media landscape requires a multifaceted approach
618 that incorporates legal reforms, education, and foreign assistance. By putting these recommendations in
619 place, Jordan may establish a media climate that really supports free expression and allows journalists and
620 media professionals to perform their social roles without fear of repercussions.

621 **8 Declarations**

622 **8.1 Study Limitations**

623 The limited and non-representative sample of three journalists and two media specialists constrains the
624 generalizability of the qualitative findings of this study. Although the semi-structured interviews offer
625 significant initial insights, a larger and more diverse sample size would likely yield a more comprehensive
626 understanding of self-censorship practices among journalists and media professionals in Jordan. Expanding
627 the sample might therefore encompass a broader array of viewpoints and contextual factors, hence
628 enhancing the depth and relevance of the findings within the Jordanian media landscape.

629 **8.2 Acknowledgments**

630 I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who generously shared their time and insights by
631 participating in interviews for this study, including those whose views were not ultimately included in the
632 final analysis.

633 **8.3 Informed Consent**

634 By providing the required informed consent, every participant indicated their willingness to take part in the
635 research project.

636 **8.4 Competing Interests**

637 With regard to the current study, there is no competing interests to declare.

638 **8.5 Publisher's Note**

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