

MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS AND POLITICAL BIAS PUZZLE: VIEW OF WORKING JOURNALISTS

Maria Noreen^{*1}, Dr. Bakht Rawan²

^{*1}PhD Scholar at Department of Mass Communication, AIOU Islamabad

²Associate Professor at Department of Mass Communication, AIOU Islamabad.

^{*1}noreenmaria186@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *

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ABSTRACT

This era is 'information age', now a days problem is not to access information but to get authentic and objective information. Media organizations have immense power to control and shape the information in the form of news. Media users perceive the news stories as impartial but it is evident that news are politically biased. This study examines the role of media organizations and their influence in creating politically biased news content. Implying the third level of influences (Organizational Level) from Hierarchy of Influences Model as theoretical framework, this survey research from working journalists of largest media groups of Pakistan revealed that media organizations have a substantial impact on news reporting and cause political bias. The editorial policy of media organizations along with the guidelines from owners is the biggest source of political bias. Results of this study highlight the need for transparency and accountability in media practices.

Keywords: Media organization, Organizational Factors, Ownership, Editorial Policy, Political Economy, Political Bias

INTRODUCTION

In this era, information is more accessible than ever. The role of media gatekeepers is as controversial as powerful. Media is a vital conduit between happenings and perception of public. It shapes public opinion and influences societal discourse. Conversely, concerns about biased content on media are increasing day by day, leaving big question mark on the impartiality of media organizations. Political bias in media content can be intentional or unintentional; can sprout from a multiple factors, such as political, economic, and cultural interests or pressures. This research article examines the media organizations contribution to biased political content. This research paper explores that how editorial decisions, interests of media

owners, and economic interests impact the fairness of information presented in the form of news to the public. This study seeks to uncover the extent to which media organizations influence the news content and stem bias. This exploration is significant in this age of misinformation and polarization. This study will help to evaluate the role and responsibility of the media organizations in fostering a well-informed and balanced society.

The objectives of this study are to:

O1: Investigate the role of ownership structures in shaping political biases within media organizations.

O2: Identify the primary sources of bias in media organizations, including ownership, editorial policies, and economic influences.

O3: Explore the strategies employed by media organizations to leverage their power in inducing political bias in news content.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the key factors contributing to political bias from media organizations?

RQ2. How do media organizations use their power to induce political bias in news?

RQ3. What role do ownership structures in shaping the political biases of media organizations?

Literature review

Most of the mass media researchers divide media biases into two types: ideological bias and structural bias. Ideological bias comes from the media workers' ideological inclines or organizational policy. Structural bias occurs from state intervention, private ownership, advertisement-based business models, and commercial imperatives. It usually favors power elites and the status quo. According to researchers, the central ideology in Pakistani media is sole and single, and it is power and money, by following this ideology electronic media in Pakistan reproduces the dominant ideology (Ghouri et al., 2022). Occupational ideology helps to attract advertisers. Consumer-oriented business enterprises and political leanings are allowed both for ideological and commercial gains. News channels fill most of the space in the glorification of political polarization. They use tactics like tone, spin, jargon, and even facts. Unbound subjectivity prevails in news channel content (Ali, 2021). In Pakistan, private media is biased against the government, they play up the controversies against the government, and they use it to fulfill commercial needs. State media is under information control and censored by the government (Mahmood & Noor-Ul-Ain, 2017). While Private media organizations work as business entities, focused on their corporate interests. All the English newspapers of the country are under the private ownership. Media owners pursue economic benefits by including media bias. In changing circumstances, the current

media researchers think that privatization and increased commercialization in media will help to reduce biased content. It was believed that independent ownership of media outlets has the potential to reduce bias in news (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006). According to researchers in the starvation of becoming the "Fourth Estate" Pakistani media completely derailed from public service which is their original mandate as they aligned with different interest groups (Rukh & Saeed, 2023). In addition, it can change the situations in government owned institutions. As a study showed that even political bias in government-owned newspapers in China could not remain cocooned from market competition effects. Newspaper consumers are segregated, and a substantial portion is against propaganda. Thus, propaganda incurs economic costs. Lower-level governments in China tend to produce less biased content to grab audiences (Qin et al., 2018). On the other hand, it is evident that increased conglomeration and corporatization of media corporations have nothing to do with impartiality or balanced coverage; they only promote their particular financial interests (Bailard, 2013).

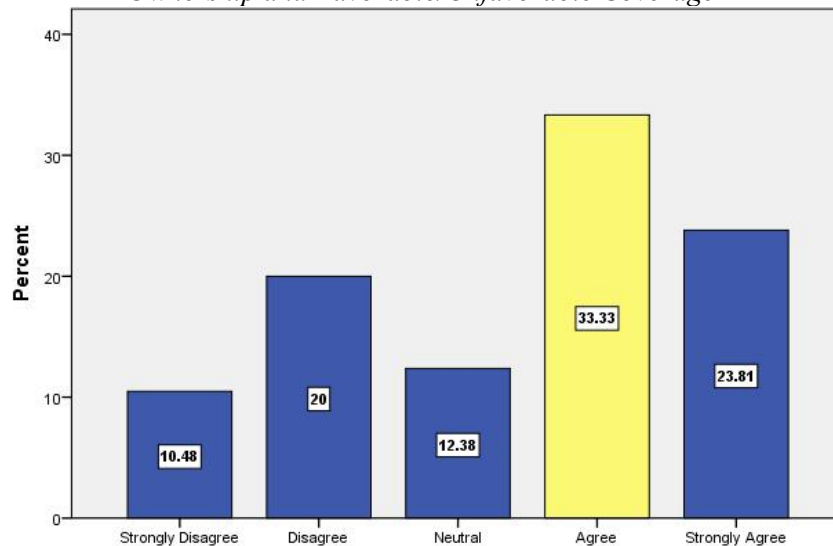
Investigators inspected the relation of party advertising with three different forms of media bias in Australian newspaper coverage. They analyzed the combination of data on party press releases, party newspaper advertising, and coverage. Results found that there are statistically significant effects of party advertising on media bias (Eberl et al., 2018), because media owners 'pay the piper'. Media ownership is the dominant force driving decisions and policy for news (Asyari, 2015), so that they have immense influence on media content. News media is being used to build the image of media groups and owners. That is why news are being constructed for media group interests. They induce bias in content by selection of facts and sources, along with the placement of news (Kartinawati et al., 2020).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected through a standardized closed ended questionnaire has been analyzed by using SPSS. Respondents of this questionnaire were working journalists from the four largest media

houses of Pakistan, including Jang group, Nawa-i-Waqt, Dawn and The Express.

Figure 1
Ownership and Favorable/Unfavorable Coverage



The chart (Figure 1) indicates that 33.33% of respondents agreed with the statements that it is the owner who is behind the favorable or unfavorable coverage of a specific political party in his/her newspaper, 23.81% strongly agreed, 20% disagreed, 12.38% responded neutral, and 10.48% strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 2
Ownership and Lesser/Greater Coverage

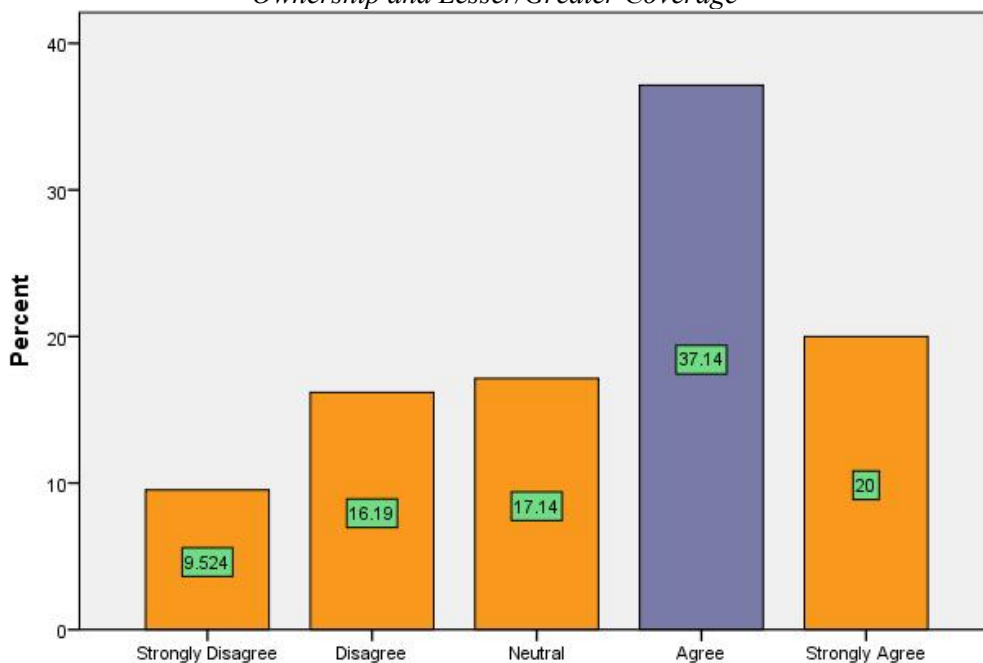


Figure 2 shows that 37.14% of respondents agreed with the statement that owner is the behind the greater or lesser coverage of a specific political party in his/her newspaper, 20% strongly agreed

with the statement, 17.14% showed a neutral response, 16.19% disagreed, and 9.524% strongly disagreed.

Figure 3
Editorial Guidelines and Political News Content

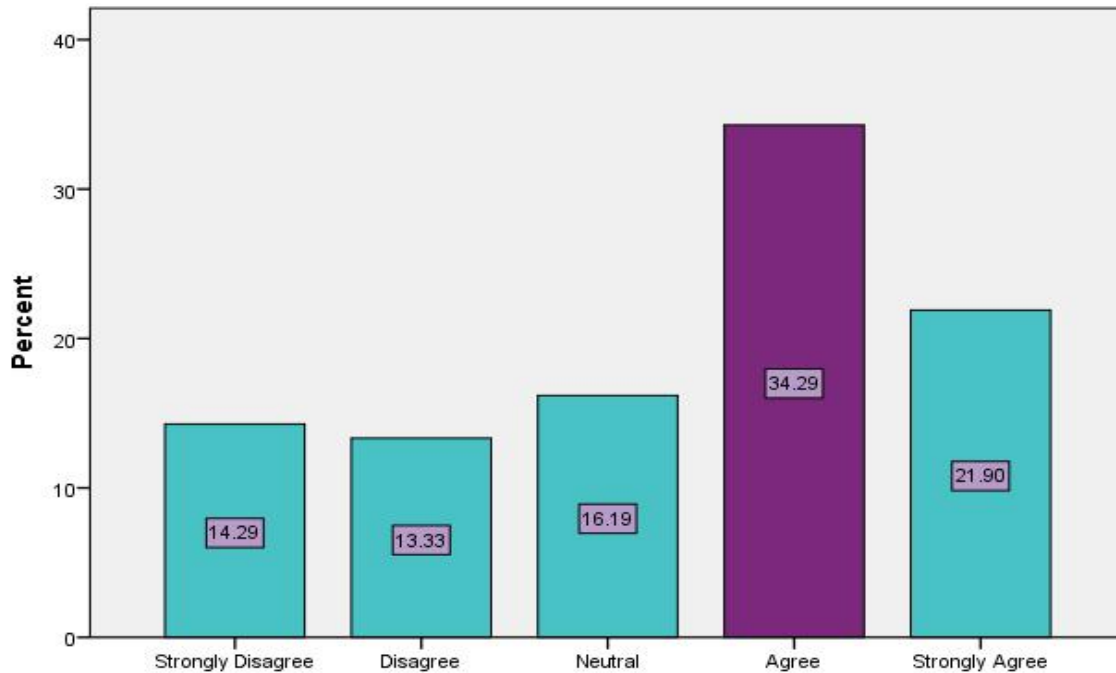


Figure 3 specifies that 34.29% agreed with the statement that editorial guidelines by the owner/management shape news content and

narratives to favor a specific political party, 21.90% strongly agreed, 16.19% remained neutral, 14.29% strongly disagreed, and 13.33% disagreed.

Figure 4
Ownership and Tone and Angling of Political Story

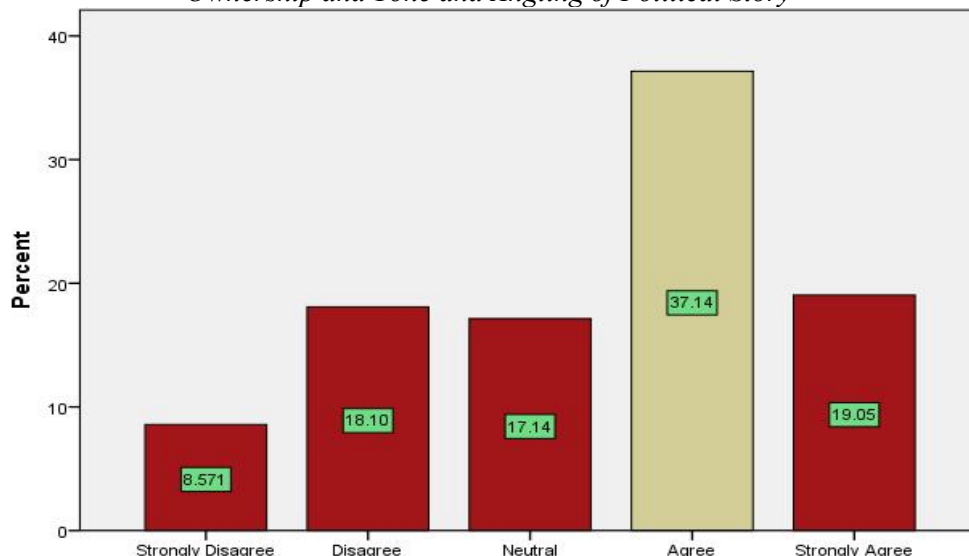


Figure 4 illustrates that 37.14% agreed with the statement that newspaper owners compel the news staff to alter the tone or angle of a political news story to align with his/her favorite political party,

19.05% strongly agreed, 18.10% disagreed, 17.14% remained neutral, 8.571% strongly disagreed.

Figure 5
Organizational Policy and Political News Coverage

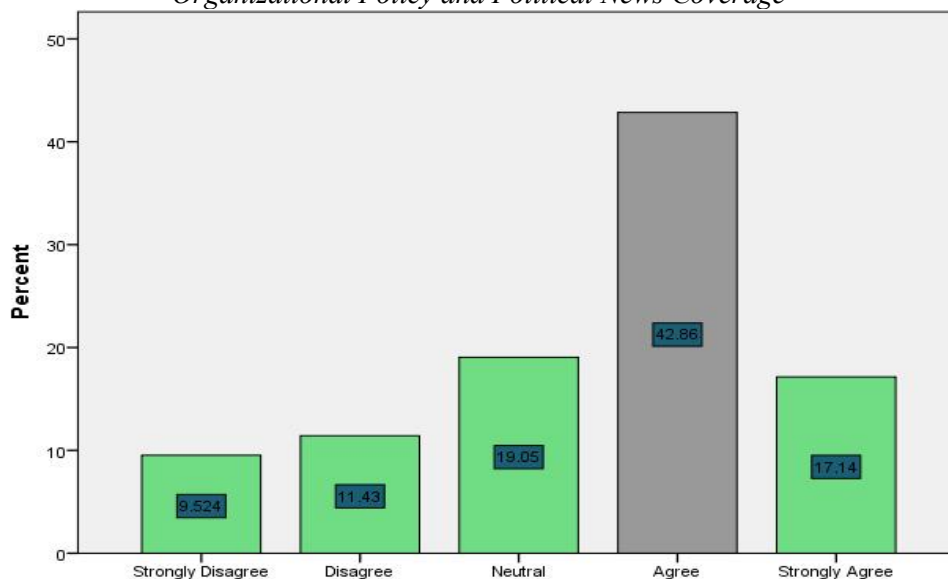


Figure 5 illuminates that 42.86% agreed with the statement that reporters follow organizational policy in coverage of political news, 19.05%

responses were neutral, 17.14% strongly agreed, 11.43% disagreed, and 9.524% strongly disagreed.

Figure 6
Editorial Policy and Reported News

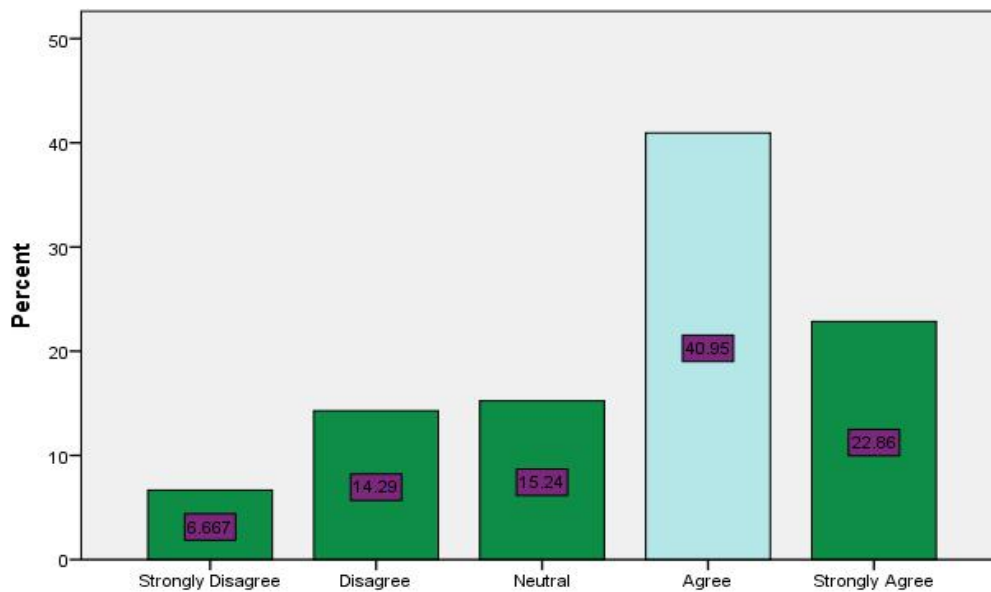
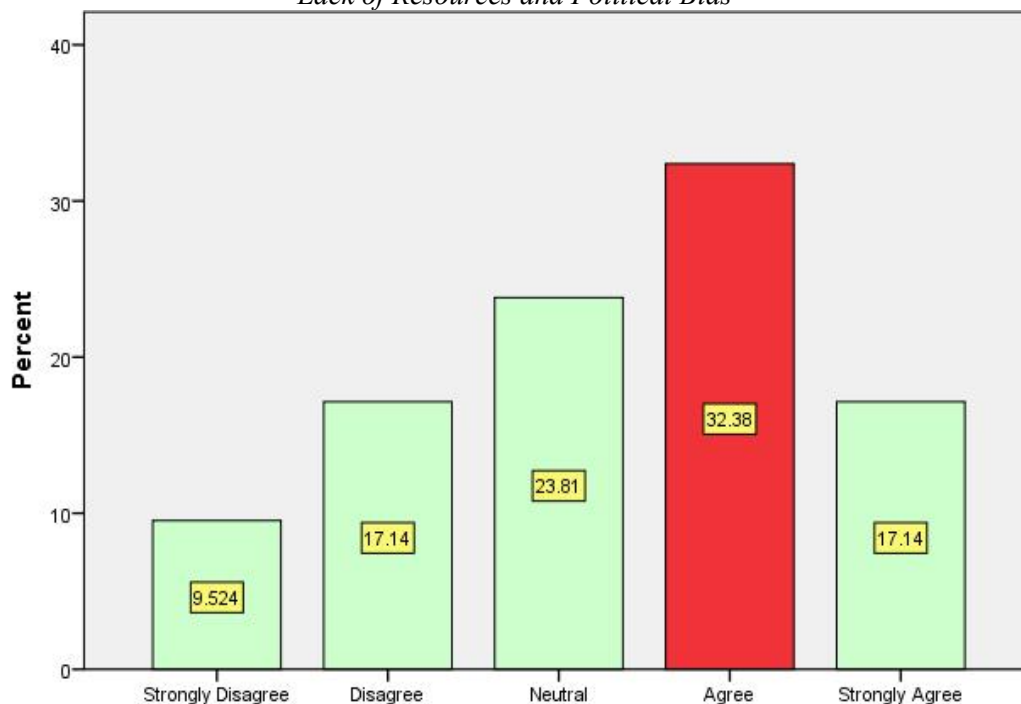


Figure 6 shows that 40.95% of respondents agreed that keeping in view the editorial policy of the newspaper, sub-editors at the newsroom often change (play up or down) the political stories

reported by reporters, 22.86% strongly agreed, neutral responses are 15.24%, responses for disagreement are 14.29% and 6.667% strongly disagreed.



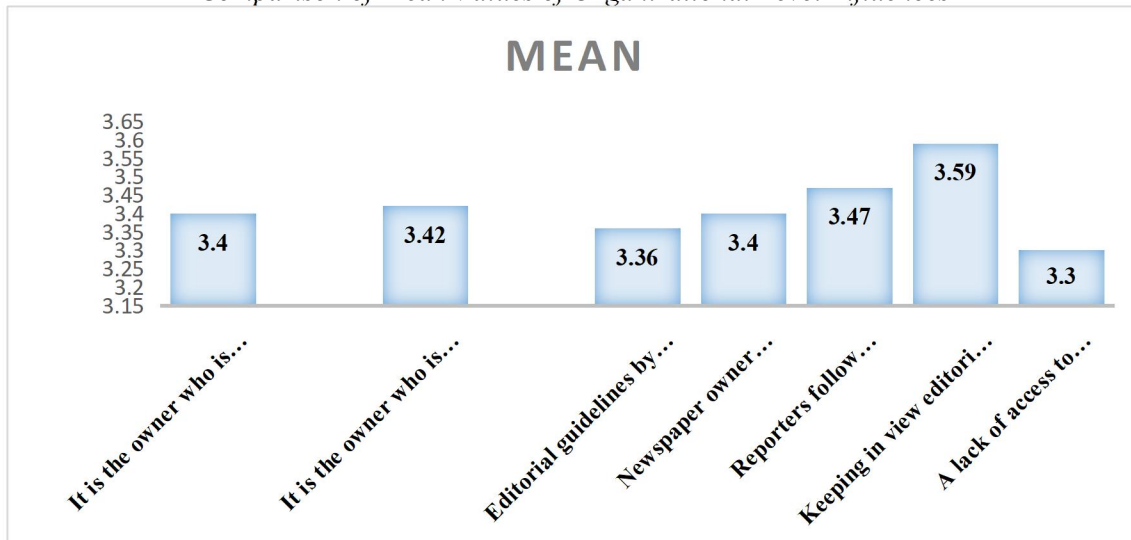
Figure 7
Lack of Resources and Political Bias



The Graph (Figure 7) shows that 32.38% of journalists agreed with the statement that a lack of access to resources and information causes political bias, as journalists may be forced to write

one-sided stories, 23.81% responses were neutral, 17.14% responses strongly agreed, 17.14% of respondents disagreed, and 9.54% respondents strongly disagreed.

Figure 8
Comparison of Mean Values of Organizational Level Influences



This graph shows the descriptive statistics (Means) of influences from media organizations on political coverage, which may cause political bias. Mean values are significant which means that media organizations have a considerable impact on news reporting and cause political bias.

Data in Figure 8 shows that the editorial policy of media organizations is the biggest source of political bias with a 3.59 and 3.47 mean value. Ownership is the second biggest source of political bias with 3.4, 3.4, and 3.42 mean values. The editorial guidelines by the owner/management are the third largest source of political bias with a 3.36 mean value. Lack of access to resources and information is also one of the big sources of political bias with a 3.3 mean value.

Discussion

Findings in Figures 1-8 indicate the influences of media organizations on the political bias in news. Data in Figure 1 revealed that media owners are behind the favorable or unfavorable coverage of a specific political party in their newspaper. They give instructions to give greater or lesser coverage to a specific political party (Figure 2). In

conclusion, the editorial guidelines by the owner/management shape news content and narratives to favor a specific political party (Figure 3). The newspaper owners also compel the news staff to alter the tone or angle of a political news story to align with their favorite political party (Figure 4). The reporters have to follow organizational policy in the coverage of political news (Figure 5). Subeditors also keep the editorial policy in view and change (play up or down) the political stories reported by reporters in the newsrooms (Figure 6). Lack of access to resources and information causes political bias, as journalists may be forced to write one-sided stories (Figure 7)

The findings in the Figure 8 show the descriptive statistics of influences from media organizations on political coverage, which may cause political bias. All mean values are significant which means that media organizations have a considerable impact on news reporting and cause political bias. The editorial policy of media organizations is the biggest source of political bias; ownership is the second biggest source of political bias. The editorial guidelines by the owner/management are the third largest source of political bias. Lack of

access to resources and information is also one of the big sources of political bias.

Past studies concluded that pro-business or hegemonic bias comes from corporate ownership and a higher level of bias means less factuality in media (Nakov et al., 2021). The findings of the current study also proved that ownership performs a huge role in decision-making about news, so if the news content of any newspaper contains bias, owner is responsible for it. Moreover, according to the results, a lack of resources causes political bias. Another study also showed similar results when the journalists opined that old equipment, deficiency of resources, and meager human skills upshot faulty and unauthentic reporting (Manzor & Ali, 2021). Reaching hard areas and lack of information access (Usher, 2023) is a major reason behind one-sided stories. Media organizations must provide their workers with all the necessary equipment and resources to get efficient and authentic information in time. Editorial policy is the organizational factor that primarily shapes the approaches to handling news in the newsrooms (Kwanda & Lin, 2020). The findings of the current study (Figure 1-7) revealed that journalists have to follow whether the editorial policy is biased or not so there is no chance that they put their own biases which are against the editorial policy of their organization. According to some experts, political economy of media is the sole reason behind media bias in Pakistan (Ahmad, 2011). Results of the current study also endorse these findings.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the newspaper owners and publishers gave preference to their broader business interests. This results in soft-pedaling the criticism of the powerful elites to protect interests. Moreover, the proprietors are mostly not attentive to training the journalists. Owners are businesspersons, not media professionals so they are a big source of political bias. Findings of the study founded strong Organizational Level Influences with a substantial impact on creating political bias in news stories.

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