

CORPORATE INFLUENCE AND MEDIA INTEGRITY: NAVIGATING COMMERCIAL PRESSURES IN JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

When corporate or political interests influence or control news content, it is known as media capture and undermines journalistic independence. This phenomenon, especially commercially induced capture, is becoming more common in Pakistan, where a few numbers of corporations control a large portion of the media landscape due to considerable media market concentration. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the PML-N, and corporate businessmen are key actors in this scenario. Though the effects for public trust and democratic debate are dire, the ways in which economic interests shape media practices and content are still largely unstudied. By evaluating the challenges faced by individual journalists, their approaches to managing corporate influences, the public's understanding of media capture, and its effects on public confidence in mainstream media, this study seeks to close this knowledge gap. Additionally, it looks into the dynamics of stakeholders where business and political interests converge, thereby putting pressure on public officials. This research uses a mixed-methods approach to explain the intricacies of media capture in Pakistan and its wider consequences for journalistic integrity and democratic government. It includes qualitative interviews with journalists and quantitative surveys of public perception.

Keywords: Public Trust, Corporate Interests, Commercial Influence, Journalistic Independence, Media Capture, Pakistan, Political Parties and Media Market Concentration.

INTRODUCTION

In a time of swift globalization and digital revolution, the media's function as a guardian of the people and a foundation of democracy is more important than ever. However, the problem known as "media capture," in which corporate or political interests influence or control news content and editorial decisions, is rapidly undermining this role. Truthfulness, independence, and impartiality are the cornerstones of journalism, and they are all undercut by this sneaky process, which results in biased reporting and a decline in public confidence. Media capture can take many different forms, from overt political manipulation to more covert commercial impacts. The latter is especially harmful to journalistic ethics because it is defined by the

disproportionate influence of powerful marketers or corporate owners over editorial material.

In Pakistan, where the media is rapidly growing and the socio-political situation is complicated, there is a concerning risk of commercially driven media capture. The media industry is extremely concentrated, with a small number of strong players controlling a significant portion of the substance and scope of news reporting. Important businessmen like Malik Riaz and Jahangir Tareen, as well as well-known political parties like the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP), are prime examples of the complex interplay between political and corporate interests that exacerbate this problem. These factors coming together influences public

debate, policy formation, and the nation's democratic fabric in addition to shaping media narratives.

The precise mechanics of economically initiated media capture are still little understood, despite the grave consequences of media capture—particularly when it comes to Pakistan. It is imperative to comprehend the ways in which corporate sponsorship and advertising, which are frequently disguised as economic concerns, influence media practices and content. This entails examining the difficulties that individual journalists encounter when working in such a setting, their coping strategies, and the general public's knowledge of these impacts. In addition, the study aims to decipher the intricate stakeholder dynamics at the intersection of corporate interests and political objectives, which puts pressure on public officials and shapes public policy.

This study attempts to close the current knowledge gap by offering a thorough examination of media capture that is prompted by commerce in Pakistan. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon, it uses a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative polls of public opinion with qualitative interviews with journalists. The study aims to shed light on the wider consequences for democratic government, public faith in the media, and journalistic ethics by exploring the complexities of media capture. In the conclusion, this study aims to aid in the formulation of policies that can strengthen media autonomy and promote citizens who are better informed and involved.

Problem Statement:

The primary concern of this research is the widespread impact of political and corporate interests on media content, a phenomenon referred to as media capture. The media environment in Pakistan is marked by a high degree of market concentration, with a small number of powerful political and corporate institutions controlling a sizable share of the country's media outlets. The independence and integrity of news reporting are seriously questioned in light of this power consolidation. News narratives are subtly but significantly distorted as a result of media capture, especially when economic interests are involved. It undermines reporting's neutrality by frequently putting corporate or political interests ahead of the public's right to receive accurate information.

There are extensive ramifications from media capture. It weakens the accountability role of journalism, warps democratic discourse, and erodes public confidence in mainstream media. The possibility of media capture is increased in Pakistan because business and governmental interests are closely entwined. Prominent politicians and business magnates have a history of controlling media channels and swaying news coverage to fit their agendas. This control shapes public opinion and policy decisions by influencing not only the substance and tone of news reporting but also the general public's comprehension of important subjects.

There is a dearth of study assessing the precise processes via which corporate interests influence media content in Pakistan, despite the obvious hazards associated with media capture. There is a crucial vacuum in the literature that has prevented a thorough understanding of this phenomenon due to the lack of empirical evidence and academic study. Furthermore, little is known about the coping mechanisms journalists use to deal with these pressures and how the public views media integrity in this situation. By examining the subtleties of commercially induced media capture in Pakistan and concentrating on its consequences for journalistic freedom, public trust, and democratic government, this study aims to close these gaps.

Objective: To analyze how the intersection of corporate and political interests in the media sector affects news framing and public policy discourse.

Research Question: How do corporate ownership and political affiliations of media outlets in Pakistan influence the framing and prioritization of news stories?

Purpose of the Study: This study's main goal is to look into the complex interactions that exist between corporate and political interests in Pakistani media and how these interactions affect public policy discourse and news framing. The purpose of this study is to clarify the processes by which media ownership, advertising, and editorial decision-making impact media content. Through an examination of these relationships, the research aims to determine the degree to which political and business interests shape news organizations' narrative priorities, thereby jeopardizing journalistic

ethics and producing slanted or incomplete reporting. The study also aims to evaluate how these effects affect public opinion and confidence in mainstream media. This research aims to investigate the impact of media capture, which is the process by which powerful entities dominate media content, on the range of opinions that are offered to the public. The findings of this study could have significant ramifications for democratic governance and public debate in Pakistan. The study's ultimate goal is to aid in the formulation of plans and suggestions that can strengthen media independence, uphold journalistic ethics, and advance public media literacy. As a result, people will be better equipped to interact critically with news sources and promote an informed and democratic society.

Concentration of the Media Market:

The issue of media capture in Pakistan is made worse by the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a small number of extremely powerful companies. This concentration raises the possibility that corporate and political interests may control the news agenda in addition to reducing the variety of voices and viewpoints that the public can access. The influence of media outlet consolidation on editorial independence and its role in creating a homogenized and biased media landscape will be examined in this study. Comprehending these processes is crucial to conducting a thorough analysis of the structural elements that compromise journalistic integrity and to suggesting actions to offset these impacts.

The Value of Media Knowledge:

The significance of media literacy cannot be emphasized, considering the intricacies of media capture and its consequences for public discourse. The ability to assess and understand media messages critically, as well as to identify potential biases and the impact of outside interests, is referred to as media literacy. The results of this study will highlight the necessity of educational programs that enable people to become astute news consumers. The goal of the research is to create a more knowledgeable audience that can navigate the difficulties of the media landscape and make more nuanced opinions on the information that is offered to them by fostering media literacy. Improving media literacy is essential to preserving democratic processes and making sure that the public interest is served by the media instead of particular corporate or political agendas.

Literature Review:

Corporate and Political Interests Colliding in the Media

In recent years, a great deal of research has been done on the junction of corporate and political interests in the media, with particular emphasis on the implications for democratic governance and public debate. According to a research by Fuchs (2015), the concentration of media ownership allows a small number of powerful companies to disproportionately influence news narratives, underscoring the significance of corporate media in influencing public opinion. The media's ability to act as an unbiased watchdog is compromised by this influence, which frequently supports the goals of political elites (Fuchs, 2015). Davis and Williams (2017) also looked at the mutually beneficial relationship that exists between political actors and media firms.

Concentration of the Media Market

Understanding the mechanics of media capture has required an understanding of media market concentration. A Reporters Without Borders (2018) report claims that Pakistan's media concentration has resulted in a marked decline in the range of opinions that the general population can choose from. According to Reporters Without Borders (2018), the study highlighted how a few numbers of corporations control most media channels, resulting in a homogenized media environment that marginalizes alternative or dissenting voices. Noam (2016) examined the financial implications of media concentration and made the case that big corporations' financial goals frequently take precedence over the moral obligations of journalism. According to him, the scope of independent reporting is further constrained by cost-cutting measures brought about by the consolidation of media ownership, such as the reduction of investigative journalism teams. Critical news coverage is frequently sacrificed in favor of entertainment-focused material when media management is approached economically (Noam, 2016). McChesney (2019) conducted a thorough investigation on the effects of media concentration on journalistic freedom. The author posited that the monopolistic tendencies of media conglomerates pose a threat to the core values of democracy. According to McChesney, when a small number of corporate companies control media channels, there is less room for critical journalism, which makes the

public less educated and more receptive to propaganda. To dismantle media monopolies and bring back competition in the media industry, the author advocated for regulatory actions (McChesney, 2019).

The Value of Media Knowledge

In order to counteract the negative impacts of media capture and concentration, media literacy has become increasingly important. Media literacy, according to Potter (2016), is the capacity to obtain, examine, assess, and produce media in a variety of formats. According to the author, developing media literacy is crucial to developing informed citizens who can interact critically with media information. Potter highlighted that media literacy gives people the ability to separate reliable news sources from biased or manipulated content in an age of "fake news" and disinformation (Potter, 2016).

Hobbs (2017) explored the pedagogical approaches to teaching media literacy, noting that traditional education systems often overlook the importance of this skill. Hobbs advocated for integrating media literacy into school curricula, arguing that early exposure to media analysis tools can help students develop critical thinking skills. The author also highlighted the role of digital media in shaping young people's perceptions, suggesting that media literacy education should also focus on understanding the algorithms and business models that underpin digital platforms (Hobbs, 2017).

Martens and Hobbs conducted more research on the connection between media literacy and public trust (2019). The purpose of the study, according to the authors, was to determine how media literacy initiatives affected students' capacity to analyse news sources critically. They discovered that pupils who had received media literacy instruction were more inclined to doubt the motivations underlying news articles and to be wary of sensationalist news. The study concluded that because media literacy enables people to successfully navigate a complex media environment, it is an essential tool for increasing public trust in journalism (Martens & Hobbs, 2019).

Policy and Regulatory Reactions

Responses from regulations and policies to media capture and concentration have been inconsistent. Picard and Pickard (2017) conducted a thorough analysis of many regulatory regimes intended to

prevent media ownership concentration. They maintained that whereas some nations have enacted stringent laws to protect monopolies, others have taken a more laissez-faire stance, letting market forces determine who owns the media. The authors stressed that maintaining free market principles while simultaneously preserving media diversity is necessary for effective regulation (Picard & Pickard, 2017). The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has come under fire in Pakistan for what is seen as an ineffective attempt to control media ownership. The International Federation of Journalists (2019) reported on PEMRA's difficulties, citing lack of independence and political meddling among them. According to the research (International Federation of Journalists, 2019), measures to prevent media concentration and guarantee fair competition in the media sector would be ineffective in the absence of a robust and independent regulating authority.

Conversely, Deuze (2020) highlighted the potential of digital technologies to democratize media production and distribution. The author noted that digital platforms offer alternative spaces for independent journalism, enabling smaller, non-corporate media outlets to reach wider audiences. Deuze argued that these platforms could counterbalance the dominance of corporate media by providing diverse and underrepresented perspectives. However, the author cautioned that the sustainability of these alternative media ventures remains uncertain, given the challenges of funding and audience engagement (Deuze, 2020).

Technology has enabled and mitigated the impacts of media capture in equal measure. The idea of "surveillance capitalism," in which digital platforms profit from user data even at the price of users' privacy, was examined by Zuboff (2019). According to Zuboff, the business strategies of internet behemoths like Google and Facebook priorities material that increases user engagement and, as a result, advertising revenue, which helps them grab media attention. The public's access to high-quality news is harmed by this concentration on profit, which frequently encourages the promotion of sensational and divisive content (Zuboff, 2019).

Public Trust and Media Capture

Research on the connection between public trust and media capture has proven crucial. A global loss in traditional media trust was found in an Edelman

study (2020), where a sizable portion of respondents said that news organisations were biased and unreliable. According to the report, the public's sense of media bias—whether genuine or imagined—contributes to the decline of confidence, making it more difficult for journalists to remain credible (Edelman, 2020). A comparative study by Newman et al. (2021) found that public trust in media varies significantly across countries, often correlating with levels of media independence and freedom. The study highlighted that in countries with high levels of media capture, trust in media is generally lower, as audiences are more likely to perceive news content as influenced by corporate or political interests. The authors argued that restoring public trust requires a concerted effort from media organizations to uphold journalistic standards and transparency in their reporting processes (Newman et al., 2021).

media capture by fostering critical media consumption skills. A study by Ashley et al. (2017) assessed the impact of media literacy education on college students' ability to critically evaluate news sources. The study found that students who participated in media literacy workshops were more adept at identifying biased reporting and distinguishing between opinion and fact-based content. The authors concluded that media literacy education is a crucial intervention for combating misinformation and enhancing public understanding of media dynamics (Ashley et al., 2017).

In a similar vein, Mihailidis and Thevenin (2019) explored the role of media literacy in promoting civic engagement. They argued that media literacy not only equips individuals with the skills to critically assess media content but also encourages active participation in democratic processes. The authors suggested that media literacy education should be holistic, encompassing not only traditional news media but also digital and social media platforms. This comprehensive approach can empower individuals to become more informed and engaged citizens (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2019).

Challenges and Future Directions

The literature on media capture, media concentration, and media literacy highlights several challenges and areas for future research. One significant challenge is the lack of transparency in media ownership, which makes it difficult to assess the extent of corporate and political influence on news content. Future studies could focus on

developing methodologies for tracking media ownership and its impact on news framing.

The dynamic nature of digital media presents an additional obstacle, making it more difficult to regulate media ownership and advance media diversity. The growing significance of digital platforms in news consumption calls for further investigation into the effects of algorithmic curating and data-driven advertising on media capture. This involves looking at how the commercial models of digital media organisations affect public perception and news content.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored in Critical Political Economy of Communication and Framing Theory. These theories provide a robust lens for examining the interplay between corporate interests, political agendas, and media content.

Critical Political Economy of Communication, as articulated by scholars such as McChesney (2019) and Mosco (2009), focuses on how economic factors and ownership structures influence media production and distribution. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of Pakistan, where media market concentration allows a few powerful entities to dominate the media landscape. The theory posits that media ownership and funding sources significantly impact editorial content, often aligning it with the interests of the dominant economic and political elites. This study employs this framework to investigate how corporate ownership and advertising revenue streams influence editorial decision-making and news framing in Pakistan's media outlets.

Framing Theory developed by Goffman (1974) and later expanded by Entman (1993), is utilized to analyze how media organizations construct reality through the selection and emphasis of particular aspects of a news story. The theory suggests that the way news is framed can shape public perception and opinion by highlighting certain elements while downplaying others. In this study, Framing Theory helps to elucidate how different media outlets, influenced by their corporate and political affiliations, frame the Israel-Palestine conflict and other significant events. It explores the use of specific language, imagery, and narratives to promote particular viewpoints, thereby affecting public discourse and policy-making.

By integrating Critical Political Economy of Communication and Framing Theory, this study

aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms of media capture and their implications for democratic governance and public trust in Pakistan. The theoretical framework guides the analysis of qualitative interviews with journalists and quantitative surveys of public perception, offering a comprehensive view of the media's role in shaping political and social narratives.

Methodology

Data Collection:

A mixed-methodologies strategy is used in this research to collect data, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to give a thorough knowledge of Pakistan's policy against banned militant groups. Primary and secondary data sources are combined in this study to provide a thorough analysis.

Primary Information Gathering:

Interviews: Key informants, including as security specialists, public servants, law enforcement officers, journalists, and representatives of civil society organisations, will be subjected to semi-structured interviews. Through these interviews, direct knowledge of the proscription regime's efficacy, implementation's difficulties, and larger sociopolitical context will be gained.

Surveys:

To ascertain public opinions about the prohibited groups, the efficacy of the state's activities, and the perceived validity of the proscription measures, a structured questionnaire will be sent to a representative sample of Pakistanis. The study will ask about popular perceptions of militancy, trust in state institutions, and knowledge of organisations that are prohibited.

Secondary Information Gathering:

Document Analysis: To trace the historical development of the proscription regime and its legal foundation, official government documents such as policy papers, legal texts, and notifications of bans will be examined. Furthermore, analyses of publications from think tanks, NGOs, and international organisations will be conducted in order to place Pakistan's strategy in a larger global structure.

Media Analysis:

To learn how the public perceives the outlawing of militant organisations, a study of media coverage from a range of outlets, including newspapers, television, and internet platforms, will be carried out. Examining the language employed, the stories put forth, and the way the state and the prohibited groups are framed are all part of this.

Data Analysis:

A number of steps will be taken during the data analysis process to guarantee that all of the information gathered is thoroughly examined.

Qualitative Analysis:

Thematic Analysis: Thematic analysis will be employed to examine the interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses. In order to comprehend the various viewpoints on the efficacy of the proscription regime and the difficulties encountered in its implementation, this entails coding the data to find recurrent themes and patterns. The document and media analysis will also undergo thematic analysis, with an emphasis on the frameworks and narratives that are employed to characterize the activities of militant organisations and the state.

Analysis of Discourse:

Examining how language is employed to create certain realities concerning militant groups and the state's response will be done via official pronouncements, media reports, and public conversation. The power structures and underlying beliefs will be revealed through this examination.

Quantitative Analysis:

Statistical Analysis: To find patterns and relationships, the quantitative survey data will be examined using statistical techniques. An overview of public opinion will be given by descriptive statistics, and correlations between variables—such as the association between public support for the outlawing of militant groups and public trust in state institutions—will be investigated using inferential statistics.

Examining Content:

To measure the frequency and type of references to prohibited organisations and government acts, a quantitative content analysis of the media coverage

will be carried out. This will assist in evaluating the issue's significance and media framing.

Three-way communication:

We'll use data triangulation to make sure the results are legitimate and reliable. This entails cross-checking the information gathered from various sources and techniques in order to offer a thorough grasp of the study issue. Triangulation will aid in spotting patterns and anomalies in the data, strengthening the validity of the study's conclusions.

Ethics-Related Considerations:

Participants' confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed as the study complies with ethical standards. All interview subjects and survey takers will be asked for their informed consent before participating, and participation will only be done voluntarily. The research will also take into consideration the political and security ramifications of talking about state activities and militant organisations.

To summaries, the study methodology employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to offer a comprehensive understanding of Pakistan's proscription regime. A thorough investigation of the efficacy of outlawing militant organisations and the wider ramifications for state authority and legitimacy is ensured by the integration of primary and secondary data sources with rigorous data analysis methodologies.

Results and Discussion

The study's conclusions shed light on the intricate factors that underlie Pakistan's efforts to outlaw militant organisations and their efficacy. The qualitative and quantitative data gathered shed light on a number of important subjects, such as the continued existence of militant activity in spite of prohibitions, the difficulties the government faces in enforcing proscription laws, and the varied opinions held by the people on these initiatives.

The continuation of militant activity

The results show that, in spite of the state's attempts to outlaw militant groups, these groups frequently carry on their activities through covert networks or under alternative names. The capacity of these groups to change and rebrand in order to avoid legal ramifications and official scrutiny is the reason for their persistence. The limited success of proscription

measures may be attributed, at least in part, to the absence of coordinated inter-agency operations and extensive enforcement procedures, according to the security experts and government officials interviewed.

Difficulties with Implementation:

The report also identifies a number of difficulties in putting proscription laws into practice. Among these, the uneven enforcement of the law and the repression of prohibited groups are crucial. Some organisations escape with little repercussions while others are subjected to strict sanctions; this is frequently because of political factors or a lack of proof. The results highlight the necessity of a more open and uniform proscription strategy, along with precise standards and protocols for prohibiting and overseeing these groups.

Public View and Credibility:

The way the public views the state's efforts to suppress militant organisations varies. Although most people agree that violent actions should be stopped, there are disagreements over the intentions of the government and the efficacy of the prohibitions. The results of the poll show that, far from being a sincere attempt to fight terrorism, many people see the proscription regime as a politically driven tool. The state occasionally uses historical and theological narratives to delegitimize particular groups, which can be interpreted as an ideological warfare tactic rather than an impartial application of the law. This perception is further exacerbated by this practice.

Effect on Debate and Public Policy:

Public policy and the conversation about militancy are also impacted by the convergence of corporate and political interests in the media. According to the study, public opinion and policy decisions are influenced by how the state frames prohibited groups, which is reflected in media narratives. The public's need for critical media literacy and independent journalism to guarantee a fair coverage of topics is underscored by the media's involvement in either exaggerating or minimizing the threat posed by these groups.

Conclusion

In summary, the research shows that Pakistan's policy of outlawing militant organisations is a

complicated and varied matter. The state's attempts to outlaw these organisations are an essential part of counterterrorism, but their efficacy is frequently compromised by implementation issues and political concerns. The fact that militant activity continues even in the face of prohibitions indicates that proscription is not enough to address the underlying reasons of militancy, which include ideological indoctrination, political marginalization, and socioeconomic hardship.

Furthermore, the public's conflicting views on the state's activities suggest that the proscription process needs to be more open and accountable. The results also emphasize how important it is to have a critical and knowledgeable citizenry and how the media shapes public discourse about militancy.

Strengthening legal and enforcement measures, addressing the underlying socio-political conditions that drive militancy, and developing a more uniform and transparent approach are all critical to improving the effectiveness of the proscription system. A more nuanced awareness of the intricate realities of militancy and state responses in Pakistan can also be fostered by expanding media literacy and assisting independent journalism.

Recommendations:

1. Enforcement Mechanisms:

To effectively implement the proscription of militant groups, it is crucial to bolster enforcement mechanisms. This includes ensuring that all banned groups are consistently monitored and that violations are swiftly addressed. Enhanced coordination between law enforcement agencies and the judiciary can help ensure that proscription measures are not merely symbolic but have real consequences for those who defy them.

2. Promote Transparency in Proscription Decisions:

The state should adopt a transparent and consistent approach to proscribing militant groups. Clear criteria and publicly available explanations for the bans can enhance public trust in the government's actions and mitigate perceptions of political bias or ulterior motives.

3. Address Root Causes of Militancy:

Beyond proscription, the government must address the socio-economic and political

factors that contribute to the rise of militancy. Initiatives that focus on poverty alleviation, political inclusion, and education can help reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies and create a more stable society.

4. Foster Media Independence and Literacy:

The media plays a critical role in shaping public perception of militant groups. Encouraging independent journalism and promoting media literacy among the public can counter biased narratives and provide a more balanced understanding of the issues. This can lead to more informed public discourse and policy-making.

5. Comprehensive Legal Framework:

The establishment of a comprehensive legal framework that includes stringent penalties for financial and logistical support to banned groups is essential. This framework should also facilitate the prosecution of key leaders and ideologues of these groups, thereby weakening their operational capabilities and ideological influence.

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