

## **Measuring the media bias: A study of the front page of four English dailies**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Media bias is the bias or perceived bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media in the selection of events and stories that are reported and how they are covered. We know that the news media, and more specifically print media, serve as valuable sources of information and powerful modes of communication. The editorial independence of a newspaper has always been a subject to the interests of someone, whether owners, advertisers, or a government and this, as it is a general belief, give rise to the bias. The present study is an attempt to measure media bias in four leading English dailies of north-India.

**Key Words :** Media bias, Media slant, Gate keeping

### **INTRODUCTION**

Knowledge and information are essential for people to successfully respond to the opportunities and challenges of social, economic and technological changes. But to be useful, knowledge and information must be effectively communicated to people. Communication is a means for the overall development of an individual, nation or society.

Dissemination of information about various issues in an unbiased manner is one important aspect for bringing uniformity in society. The need of the hour is to build a just and free information society and for narrowing the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor.

Communication is an integral part of development process. Keeping in view to this fact, the importance of communication was recognized in our society years before.

Today, people's dependency on mass media has increased all the more than before. The question is mass media playing their role in an effective manner? Are mass media informing people about all the issues? How and to what extent are newspapers disseminating information? These are some such questions which are always relevant and need to be analyzed.

No one can deny the importance of a newspaper. They shape and build the ideology of their reader. The news media, and more specifically print media, serve as valuable sources of information and powerful modes of communication. This power controls much of what people understand of events that occur around the world on a daily basis. The way information is transferred to its recipients comes through various forms of communication, all of which is framed to meet the goals

of the providing source. Most newspapers are businesses, and they pay their expenses (such as journalists' wages, printing costs, and distribution costs) with a mixture of subscription revenue, news stand sales, and advertising revenue (other businesses or individuals pay to place advertisements in the pages, including display ads, classified ads, and their online equivalents). The editorial independence of a newspaper is thus always subject to the interests of someone, whether owners, advertisers, or a government and this, as it is a general belief, give rise to the bias.

### **Media bias:**

Media bias is the bias or perceived bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media in the selection of events and stories that are reported and how they are covered. It has been defined in a number of ways:

Greene and Stevenson (1980) suggested that there should be a reconsideration of the concept of bias. They defined bias as "the systematic differential treatment of one candidate, one party, or one side of an issue over an extended period of time. Bias is the failure to treat all voices in the marketplace of ideas equally."

D'Alessio and Allen (2000) claim in their study that Gate keeping bias (also known as selectivity or selection bias), is one of the most widely studied forms of media bias throughout the world. Gate keeping is defined as the process through which information is filtered for dissemination, whether for publication, broadcasting, the Internet, or some other mode of communication.

Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos (2009), state that gate keeping is the "process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day, and it is the center of the media's role in modern public life. [...]. This process determines not only which information is selected, but also what the content and nature of the messages, such as news, will be."

Melvin and Margaret (2009), while addressing the issue of Gate keeping bias in media, state that personnel in the news organization become gatekeepers, letting some stories pass through the system but keeping others out. This then limits, controls, and shapes the public's knowledge of the totality of actual event occurring in reality."

Quackenbush (2013) defines bias "as any form of preferential and unbalanced treatment, or favoritism". He clearly mentions in his study that a pattern of behavior associated with biased reporting is known as "bias by placement." He further states that traditionally, print stories that receive the biggest headlines and/or "above the fold," front page placement are perceived by readers as the most timely and appealing stories in the entire paper, thus garnering reader attention. This particular form of bias is directly linked to the third type of bias, known as "coverage" bias. In this context, coverage bias reflects the amount of calculable physical space each issue is allotted.

Allen (2015), defines bias by placement as a pattern of placing news stories. He says that news editors (or whichever staffers lay out a given newspaper) exercise discretion in their placement of stories. The news they consider most important and/or most likely to sell papers goes "above the fold" on the front page, where it can be read as the paper sits on the rack.

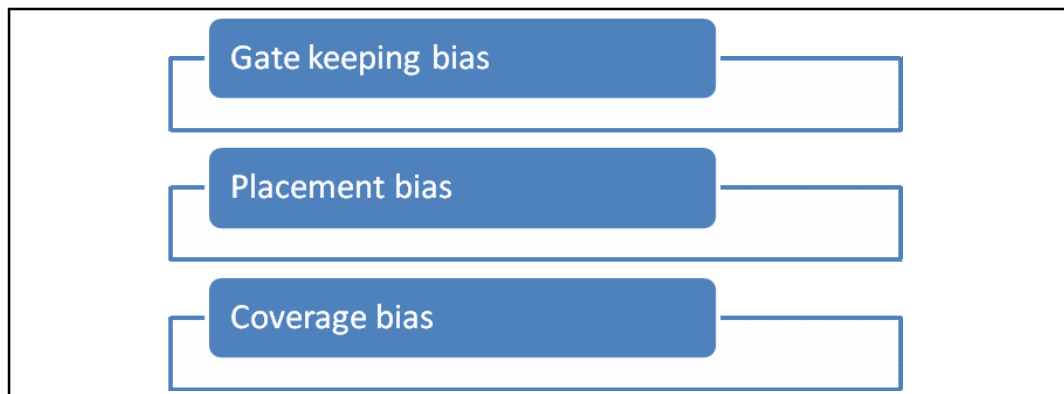
### **Objectives of the study:**

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To study the issues covered in the English dailies;
2. To analyse the content of the Front page of English dailies;
3. To find out media bias in the English dailies.

## METHODOLOGY

A content analysis of the front page of four leading and most representative broadsheet dailies of North India, namely *The Times of India*, *The Tribune*, *The Indian Express* and *Hindustan Times* was carried out for a period of four months, *i.e.* August 2017-December 2017. The content of the Front page of all the four dailies was analyzed in order to find out three primary kinds of bias:



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Data presentation: The Gate keeping bias :

It has been observed in the content analysis that gate keeping bias is there in all the four dailies.

**Table 1: Front Page: Content of News Stories**

Category	The Indian Express	Hindustan Times	The Times of India	The Tribune
Political	50	63	35	53
Sports	1	1	7	3
Crime	42	67	87	44
Education	3	6	5	3
Environment	2	4	5	2
Energy	0	1	2	1
Transportation	0	3	6	4
Court	15	18	26	26
Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	12	19	18	10
Defense	4	5	15	7
Space, Science, Technology and Communications	0	1	2	2
State and Local Government	0	0	4	0
Weather and Natural Disasters	2	3	5	2
Fires and other accidents	7	10	11	7
Dalits	0	0	0	2
Minorities	0	0	2	1
Human Interest	0	7	3	6
Health	1	3	9	1
Agriculture	0	1	1	3
Others	0	14	22	9

It has been observed that the maximum news published on the front page by all the four dailies are political, followed by crime and court. It's also worth mentioning here that all the dailies published none or very few stories associated with the *dalit* issues, minorities, agriculture etc.

**Table 2 : Front page: Content of Photographs**

Category	The Times of India	Hindustan Times	The Indian Express	The Tribune
Political	9	25	19	28
Crime	12	14	16	12
Sports	1	0	1	5
Natural Disaster	3	2	2	2
Accidents	5	6	7	11
Others	4	6	15	46
Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	0	2	2	0
Environment	0	1	0	0
Education	0	1	0	0

As far as the majority of the photographs published on the front page of all the dailies are concerned, they are also associated with politics and crime. The front page of all the leading English dailies are full of visuals associated with politics and crime.

Further, all the four dailies displayed a gate keeping bias when it came to analyzing the stories based upon their geographical orientation, global orientation, dateline orientation and byline orientation, as well. All the dailies have given more importance to the news content from North Indian region and from the metropolitan cities and other urban centers and they have ignored the rural news. Similarly, the news from the reporters and bureau have been given a preference over the wire services. Look at the table below:

**Table 3 : Front Page: News Stories Analysis (Orientation wise)**

Category		Hindustan Times	The Times of India	The Indian Express	The Tribune
Geographical Orientation wise	North India	167	205	106	142
	South India	16	24	28	21
	North East	4	2	4	0
	West	10	8	10	8
	Others	28	26	9	13
Global Orientation wise	National	209	247	152	176
	International	18	23	5	8
Date Line wise	Metropolitan	85	71	86	87
	Urban	124	171	64	92
	Others	16	8	3	8
Byline wise	Reporter	85	89	135	93
	Agency	18	8	0	36
	Bureau	124	173	27	53

### The Placement bias:

The placement bias, too, has been observed in all the newspapers during the study. The maximum news placed on top left position by The Times of India (03), Hindustan Times (11), The Tribune (8)

and The Indian Express (9), are political news which clearly indicates the placement bias in the newspapers. Similarly the political and crime stories are widely published on Top Right, Bottom Left and Bottom Right places. In case, a banner headline is there, that too, is either Political or Crime/Court based in its content.

**Table 4 : Front Page: Analysis of News Stories (Placement wise)**

Placement of the News Story	Category	The Times of India	Hindustan Times	The Tribune	The Indian Express
Top Left	Political	3	11	8	9
	Crime	6	6	7	6
	Education	0	1	0	1
	Environment	1	0	0	0
	Court	0	1	4	1
	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	1	2	0	4
	Defense	4	0	1	0
	Weather and Natural Disasters	1	1	1	0
	Fires and other accidents	3	2	3	2
	Others	0	0	1	1
	Research	1	1	0	0
Top Right	Political	3	7	11	8
	Crime	13	5	3	6
	Education	1	0	0	0
	Environment	0	0	0	1
	Energy	0	1	0	0
	Transportation	0	0	1	0
	Court	2	2	3	1
	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	2	1	4	2
	Defense	0	0	1	1
	Weather and Natural Disasters	0	1	0	1
	Fires and other accidents	0	1	2	0
	Human Interest	0	0	1	0
	Others	1	0	1	1
Bottom Left	Development	1	0	0	0
	Political	1	9	3	0
	Sports	0	0	1	0
	Crime	1	2	5	2
	Education	0	0	0	1
	Environment	0	1	0	0
	Court	0	1	3	0
	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	1	2	0	1
	Defense	0	0	1	0
	Space, Science, Technology and Communications	0	1	0	0
	Weather and Natural Disasters	1	0	1	1
	Fires and other accidents	0	0	2	0

Table 4 contd....

Table 4 contd...

Bottom Right	Minorities	0	0	1	0
	Human Interest	0	2	5	0
	Health	0	1	0	1
	Others	0	1	0	1
	Development	0	0	0	1
	Research	3	0	0	0
	Political	0	1	4	1
	Crime	1	0	0	0
	Environment	0	0	1	0
	Energy	0	0	1	0
	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	0	0	1	0
	Defense	0	0	1	0
	Space, Science, Technology and Communications	0	0	1	0
	Weather and Natural Disasters	0	0	0	1
	Others	0	0	3	0

**Table 5 : Front Page: Analysis of News Stories (Placement wise: Banner)**

Placement of the News Story	Category	The Times of India	Hindustan Times	The Tribune	The Indian Express
Banner	Political	1	1	0	1
	Crime	2	1	0	2
	Court	2	0	0	5

**The Coverage bias:**

As far as the coverage bias is concerned, the four dailies indicate their biased approach. The calculable physical space allotted to various issues by all the four dailies clearly show that they are biased while allotting space to various issues.

**Table 6 : Front Page: News stories and advertisements (Measurements in cm<sup>2</sup>)**

Category	The Times of India	The Tribune	Hindustan Times	The Indian Express
Political	4643	7460	9250	7861.75
Sports	208	124	21	60
Crime	4562.75	5500	6736.75	4350.25
Education	252	448	380.5	452
Environment	218	268	276	140
Energy	24	220	240	0
Transportation	48	282	299	84
Court	3314.5	4567	1858.75	2340.25
Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	1646	1048	716.75	1057.75
Defense	468	776	12	940

Table 6 contd.....

Table 6 contd....

Space, Science, Technology and Communications	144	252	88	0
Weather and Natural Disasters	643	660	636	297
Fires and other accidents	1126	2013	805	987
Dalits	0	144	0	0
Minorities	0	144	0	0
Human Interest	117	1296	624	698
Health	184	144	16	0
Agriculture	24	160	0	115.5
Others	841	963	512	2399.5
Development	144	0	0	280
Research	224	0	0	0
Advertisement	19935	7366	14657	19951.2

The table clearly indicates that The Times of India (4643 cm<sup>2</sup>), The Tribune (7460 cm<sup>2</sup>), Hindustan Times (9250 cm<sup>2</sup>) and The Indian Express (7861.75 cm<sup>2</sup>) have devoted maximum space to the political news during the time of study.

When it comes to photographs on the front page, the all four newspapers prefer to publish photographs associated either with crime or with politics so as to give emphasis on these two kinds of news and capture the readers' attention. The table below explains it in detail:

Table 7 : Front Page: Photographs (Measurements in cm<sup>2</sup>)

Category	The Times of India	The Tribune	Hindustan Times	The Indian Express
Political	410	2105	2044.5	1267.5
Sports	139.5	460	332.5	3
Crime	760	1205	1466.25	1547
Education	0	32	0	0
Environment	0	40	0	0
Court	0	292	0	0
Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	0	104	0	84
Defense	0	176	0	0
Space, Science, Technology and Communications	0	160	0	0
Weather and Natural Disasters	152	633	289	66
Fires and other accidents	420.5	1140	354	323.5
Human Interest	0	252	0	0
Others	221	995	994.75	1630

**Findings:**

It has been observed that gate keeping bias is there in all the four dailies. All the four dailies give preference to political news, followed by crime news and court news. As far as the choice regarding publishing of photographs is concerned, majority of the photographs published on the front page of all the dailies are associated with politics and crime.

All the four dailies displayed a gate keeping bias when it came to analyzing the stories based upon their geographical orientation, global orientation, dateline orientation and byline orientation, as well. All the dailies have given more importance to the news content from North Indian region and from the metropolitan cities and other urban centers and they have ignored the rural news. Similarly, the news from the reporters and bureau are given a preference over the wire services.

The placement bias, too, has been observed in all the newspapers during the study. It's a well recognized fact that there are certain focal points on the page of a newspaper which attract a reader's attention. The stories that are placed above the fold are considered to be the more important. It has been observed during the study that all the English dailies have given prominence to political stories as they have been placed on the top left position. The maximum news placed on top left position by The Times of India (03), Hindustan Times (11), The Tribune (8) and The Indian Express (9), are political news which clearly indicates the placement bias in the newspapers. Similarly the political and crime stories are widely published on Top Right, Bottom Left and Bottom Right places. In case, a banner headline is there, that too, is either Political or Crime/Court based in its content.

As far as the coverage bias is concerned, the four dailies indicate their biased approach. The calculable physical space allotted to various issues by all the four dailies clearly show that they are biased while allotting space to various issues.

The data gathered through the analysis of their content shows that The Times of India (4643 cm<sup>2</sup>), The Tribune (7460 cm<sup>2</sup>), Hindustan Times (9250 cm<sup>2</sup>) and The Indian Express (7861.75 cm<sup>2</sup>) have devoted maximum space to the political news during the time of study.

When it comes to photographs on the front page, the all four newspapers prefer to publish photographs associated either with crime or with politics so as to give emphasis on these two kinds of news and capture the readers' attention.

**Conclusion:**

The study has revealed to a great extent that the information supplied to the consumers of media is filtered for dissemination, whether for publication, broadcasting, the Internet, or some other mode of communication. It also throws light upon the fact that systematic differential treatment to certain issues is being given by the media and also upon the failure of the media to treat all voices in the marketplace of ideas equally. Last but not the least, it can be concluded that there is a strong presence of gate keeping bias, placement bias and coverage bias in the English dailies.

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