

## **Media Bias: A Study of Leading English Dailies in light of *Galtung and Ruge's Model***

**RAVI SHANKAR**

Associate Professor & Head  
Department of Mass Communication and Journalism,  
Government Post Graduate College for Girls, Cheeka, Kaithal (Haryana) India

### **ABSTRACT**

Now a days, people's dependency upon mass media has increased. In such circumstances, the greatest question is that whether mass media is playing their role in an effective manner? There are a lot of questions that demand attention nowadays. Are they (mass media) informing people about all the issues? How and to what extent are newspapers disseminating information? Is the information supplied by the media credible? Are the readers satisfied with what they are being served by the media? What is the actual state of journalism? These are some such questions which are always relevant and need to be analyzed. It has been noticed that, there has been an increasing public debate about such matters in the recent years. The present study made an attempt to study the issues covered in the leading Indian English dailies and analysed the content of their Front page in light of *Galtung and Ruge's model* to find out media bias.

**Key Words :** Media, Bias, Media coverage, *Galtung and Ruge's model*

“What is central to the functioning of the news media in Indian democracy is the combination of accuracy with the avoidance of bias.”

-Amartya Sen

### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication has always been an integral part of the development process and its importance was recognized in our society centuries ago. The media clearly have a strong and complex influence upon how we understand and shape our world. From news reporting and investigative journalism to the broadcasting of soaps, dramas and films, they provide us with information, entertainment and seek to enhance our understanding of the world. Hence, in often direct and indirect ways, the media engage with and affect our beliefs, values and fundamental commitments. Naturally, then, given the

media's increasing presence and influence within our world, there arise a host of ethical and social questions that need to be addressed. One such question is the issue of media bias.

The accusations of bias, press cynicism, media manipulation, condemnations of journalistic intrusions into privacy, worries about the damaging or distortive effect of the media and hotly contested pronouncements about the appropriate forms of media regulation or censorship have all hit the headlines with ever greater frequency.

### **Media bias: Meaning and definitions:**

Generally, the term media bias is explained as 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. In order to have a more clear understanding of the term media bias, let's try to understand the meaning of the

term bias itself:

According to the Collins Dictionary, “Bias is a tendency to prefer one person or thing to another, and to favor that person or thing.”

According to the Oxford Dictionary, “Bias is a concentration on or interest in one particular area or subject.”

Thus for the purpose of this study, media bias can be understood as the bias or perceived bias of the journalists and news producers within the mass media when they concentrate upon certain particular issues while ignoring the others.

Media bias has been defined in a number of ways:

Stevenson and Greene (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.”

Chomsky (1989) states that, “it is a natural expectation, on uncontroversial assumptions, that the major media and other ideological institutions will generally reflect the perspectives and interests of established power.”

Kenney and Simpson (1993) defined bias as “a pattern of constant favoritism” of one candidate over the other, and “bias occurs when one candidate or party receives more news coverage and more favorable coverage over an extended period of time.”

Entman (1993) explained that to frame a story is to “select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation”. The media highlight a certain piece of information about a main topic of a news story, which raises the salience of the issue. The term salience means “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audience”.

### Types of media bias:

Media bias has been observed in a number of ways in the media. Various scholars have classified it in different ways. For example, McQuail (1992), suggested that bias has four different forms:

- **Partisanship:** It is usually identified by its form such as editorial column, paid advertisement, forum, or letter. Partisanship often is seen in

reporting an open campaign;

- **Unwitting bias:** It refers to unintentional biased choice of topics or news angles;
- **Ideology:** It is usually hidden in texts like the tone of reporting the news;
- **Propaganda:** It is often seen in the form of objective news such as public relations sources.

Similarly, 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. The academic theory of gate keeping is founded in multiple fields of study, including communication studies, journalism, political science, and sociology. Gate keeping occurs at all levels of the media structure—from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed or covered, and includes media outlet owners and even advertisers. Thus Gate keeping is a process by which information is filtered to the public by the media.

Shoemaker and 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 centre 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.”

DeFleur and DeFleur (2009), while addressing the issue of Gate keeping bias in media, state that:

1. In exercising its “surveillance” function, every news medium has a very large number of stories brought to its attention daily by reporters, wire services, and a variety of other sources.
2. Due to a number of practical considerations, only a limited amount of time or space is available in any medium for its daily presentations of the news to its audience. The remaining space must be devoted to advertising and other content.
3. Within any news organization there exists a news perspective, a subculture that includes a complex set of criteria for judging a particular news story – criteria based on economic needs of the medium, organizational policy, definitions of news

worthiness, conceptions of the nature of relevant audience, and beliefs about fourth estate obligations of journalists.

4. This news perspective and its complex criteria are used by editors, news directors, and other personnel who select a limited number of news stories for presentation to the public. They then encode them in ways such that the requirements of the medium and the tastes of the audience are met.
5. Therefore, 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."

The bias by placement and coverage bias are two other important forms of media bias. 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." This pattern reflects the practice of journalists intentionally depicting news stories in either a prominent or negligible way so as to magnify or down play the information; this pattern is often, but not always, attributed to the issue's coincidence with the journalist's personal political or social belief system. 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 raises a vital question that why does a story appear across the top half of the front page, and in other cases it is buried back with the obituaries and the horoscope? He further explains that news editors (or whichever staffers lay out a given newspaper) exercise great 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 newspaper sits on the rack. Less important stories go on the bottom half of the first page, on the first page of other sections of the

paper, on page two or three, and so on. The (supposedly) least important stories appear in the back pages. As a general rule story placement is a measure of how important the editor considers the story. Allen emphasizes upon his point with an example of The Washington Post which was investigating the travel habits of Sununu and reported 27 stories in 68 days. The Washington Post put the Sununu story on the front page eleven times, guaranteeing that the story would remain on the front pages of other papers and early in radio and television newscasts.

Some other most commonly discussed forms of bias are as under (Media bias, 2018, August 11):

- **Advertising bias**, when stories are selected or slanted to please advertisers.
- **Concision bias**, a tendency to report views that can be summarized succinctly, crowding out more unconventional views that take time to explain.
- **Corporate bias**, when stories are selected or slanted to please corporate owners of media.
- **Mainstream bias**, a tendency to report what everyone else is reporting, and to avoid stories that will offend anyone.
- **Sensationalism**, bias in favor of the exceptional over the ordinary, giving the impression that rare events, such as airplane crashes, are more common than common events, such as automobile crashes.
- **Structural bias**, when an actor or issue receives more or less favorable coverage as a result of news worthiness and media routines, not as the result of ideological decisions (e.g., incumbency bonus).
- **False balance**, when an issue is presented as even sided, despite disproportionate amounts of evidence.

### Review of literature:

Now a days, mass media has constantly been lured into overstepping the fire line of informing, educating or entertaining the public. The habits and practices of media have time and again often resulted in sensationalizing, misleading, instigating or giving ulterior ideas leading to mistakes, triggering catastrophe or toppling governance established by law. The trend is also trickling down to the domestic media. Time and again media bias and its reasons have been discussed by various thinkers and

social scientists. Some thinkers are of the view that media outlets are primarily driven by profit motives, as opposed to political motives. Here, the bias may arise from the preferences of consumers of the media. Under the assumption that consumers prefer to consume news that confirms their prior beliefs, competition forces newspapers to differentiate themselves by moving to the ideological extremes. The present study aims to study the bias in leading English dailies. The review of related literature is done in that perspective. The reviewed literature is related with the issue of media bias. A lot of work has been done in the field of media bias at the international level. However, there are no significant Indian studies available related with the subject. Let's have a look at some major contributions upon the issue:

Juneja (2018) in a case study, titled, 'Breaking News: A Case Study of the Indian Media Industry', states that Indian Media Industry is one of the world's most diverse and vibrant in addition to being largely free and fair. However, among all the external forces that impact the Indian Media Industry, politics is perhaps the most significant in terms of how it forces media houses to either fall in line or be left out. To explain, governments worldwide seek to influence news coverage and engage in media manipulation, and India is no exception.

She further says that, indeed, whichever party is in power, they seek to manage the media to change the way in which voters perceive them by persuading media houses to toe the party line. Moreover, in the present times, there are very few neutral media houses left with most of them allied to one particular political dispensation or the other.

According to her, the Indian media is running after the profits. She says that the blind pursuit of profits must not be at the expense of its main reason for existence which is being a disseminator of valuable news and information. She clearly mentions that the Indian News Media seems to be failing the basic function of being a custodian of democracy by reporting news and views as the demands of fairness and impartiality are concerned. Instead, what passes off for news is simply advertorials where paid news dominates

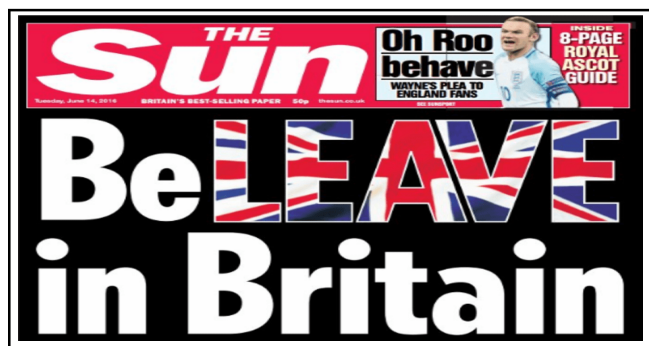
Ceren *et al.* (2016) in their study titled 'Fair and balanced? Quantifying media bias through crowd sourced content analyses' investigated the selection and framing of political issues in fifteen major US news outlets. Starting with 803,146 news stories published over twelve months, they first used supervised learning algorithms to

identify the 14 per cent of articles pertaining to political events. They then recruited 749 online human judges to classify a random subset of 10,502 of these political articles according to topic and ideological position. They found that news outlets are considerably more similar than generally believed. Specifically, with the exception of political scandals, major news organizations present topics in a largely nonpartisan manner, casting neither Democrats nor Republicans in a particularly favorable or unfavorable light. Moreover, again with the exception of political scandals, little evidence exists of systematic differences in story selection, with all major news outlets covering a wide variety of topics with frequency largely unrelated to the outlet's ideological position. Finally, news organizations express their ideological bias not by directly advocating for a preferred political party, but rather by disproportionately criticizing one side, a convention that further moderates overall differences.

Panneerselvam (2016), Readers' Editor of The Hindu, in an article titled 'Investigating the charges of bias' published in The Hindu on dated March 7, 2016 states that, "...before venturing to answer the question of bias, I wish to restate the broad framework that guides and informs my work. As I have mentioned in some of my earlier columns, we are bound by two written documents — Terms of Reference for the Office of the Readers' Editor and Living our Values: Code of Editorial Values. I also draw from the rich oeuvre of journalism literature that explores the core values and cardinal principles of this profession that is dedicated to informing the public. The five key journalistic requirements are truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity, and accountability. Its two central functions are the credible-informational and the critical-investigative-adversarial. It operates to fulfill two social requirements — what is in public interest and what the public is interested in — in a manner where issues of public interest is not subsumed by the dictates of what the public is interested in."

Hard Evidence: analysis shows extent of press bias towards Brexit (2016): In an article published on June 16, 2016, the website, <https://theconversation.com>, clearly states that they have the hard evidence proving that the press was biased towards Brexit. They have posted a photograph of Britain's leading newspaper 'The Sun' which clearly suggests that the newspaper advocated for Brexit. Have a look at the picture:

Allen (2015), in his research study on media bias



titled, 'Media bias: 8 types [a classic, kinda]', says that news media bias has been a hot topic lately. He further states that the bias may be worse than we've seen before and the problem is not new. He says that media bias is present in media in many forms such as bias by placement. He defines bias by placement as a pattern of placing news stories. He raises a vital question that why does a story appear across the top half of the front page, and in other cases it is buried back with the obituaries and the horoscope? He further explains that news editors (or whichever staffers lay out a given newspaper) exercise great 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 newspaper sits on the rack. Less important stories go on the bottom half of the first page, on the first page of other sections of the paper, on page two or three, and so on. The (supposedly) least important stories appear in the back pages. As a general rule story placement is a measure of how important the editor considers the story. Allen emphasizes upon his point with an example of The Washington Post which was investigating the travel habits of Sununu and reported 27 stories in 68 days. The Washington Post put the Sununu story on the front page eleven times, guaranteeing that the story would remain on the front pages of other papers and early in radio and television newscasts.

### 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 in light of *Galtung and Ruge's model*;
3. To find out media bias in the English dailies.

### Research 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 light of *Galtung and Ruge's model*:

### The Galtung and Ruge's model:

Harcup and O'Neill (2017) in their study, 'What is News? News values revisited (again)', refer to Galtung and Ruge's model of news values (1967). Galtung and Ruge had devised a list describing what they believed were significant contributing factors as to how the news is constructed. Their theory argues that the more an event accessed these criteria the more likely it was to be reported on in a newspaper. Harcup and Deirdre, in their study, while indicating towards selection bias state that "although there are exceptions to every rule, we have found that news stories must generally satisfy one or more of the following requirements" if they are to be selected (for publication):

1. **The power elite:** Stories concerning powerful individuals, organizations or institutions.
2. **Celebrity:** Stories concerning people who are already famous.
3. **Entertainment:** Stories concerning sex, show business, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines.
4. **Surprise:** Stories that have an element of surprise and/or contrast.
5. **Bad news:** Stories with particularly negative overtones, such as conflict or tragedy.
6. **Good news:** Stories with particularly positive overtones, such as rescues and cures.
7. **Magnitude:** Stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact.
8. **Relevance:** Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience.
9. **Follow-up:** Stories about subjects already in the news.
10. **Newspaper agenda:** Stories that set or fit the news organization's own agenda.

Thus, in a way, the newspaper publishers give preference to the content dealing with the above mentioned categories as mentioned in the model. In other

**Table 1 : Analysis of the front page news based upon Galtung and Ruge's model**

Category	The Indian Express	Hindustan Times	The Times of India	The Tribune
Power Elite	65 (50.39%)	71 (31.42%)	61 (23.02%)	79 (42.47%)
Bad News	51 (39.53%)	80 (35.40%)	103 (38.87%)	53 (28.49%)
Others	13 (10.08%)	75 (33.19%)	101 (38.11%)	54 (29.03%)
Total	129	226	265	186

words, it can also be said that the news organizations are biased while selecting the content for publication and as suggested by *Galtung and Ruge's model*, they look for certain specific kind of news.

As far as the present study is concerned, only front page was analyzed for its content of news stories. Since the number of stories on the front page was limited, an attempt was made to analyze them upon the basis of the *Galtung and Ruge's model*. The majority of the content on the front page of all the dailies fell into two categories, namely the Power Elite and the Bad News. The content belonging to rest of the categories as mentioned in the model were either not there at all or was there in a very less quantity. Therefore, the model was compressed into three broad categories, namely, 'Power Elite', 'Bad News' and 'Others'.

The Table 1 clearly indicates that all the dailies gave preference to content associated either with the 'power elite' or with the 'bad news'. It also indicates that out of the 129 news items published on the front page The Indian Express published 50.39% news associated with the 'power elite' while 39.53% news were the 'bad news'. Similarly, Hindustan Times had 31.42% news related with the 'power elite' and 35.40% 'bad news'. Similar was the case with The Times of India as it published 23.02% and 38.87% news belonging to the 'power elite' and 'bad news' category, respectively. Last but not the least; The Tribune had 42.47% news associated with the power elite while it had 28.49% 'bad news'. Thus it can be inferred that all the dailies concentrated upon the power elite and the bad news and were biased in their approach.

### Conclusion:

The news media plays an important role in society. It sets the stage for political news, manages their agenda, sources, and controls the information. It functions as a window to the outside world, and possesses the ability to shape public knowledge, attitudes, and their behavior. It is no surprise then that the media is one of the most criticized institutions now a days. Yet media remains the

dominant source of news. This dominant and powerful role as public informants that the news media plays justifies a lot of the hype associated with the media bias debate. Here it is important to clarify that the term 'media bias' implies a pervasive or widespread bias contravening the standards of journalism, rather than the perspective of an individual journalist or article.

Media bias is present all over the world. There are a number of national and international watchdog groups that report on bias in the media. There are certain limitations to the media neutrality including the inability of journalists to report all available stories and facts, government influence, the pressures of the market forces such as advertisers etc. There are certain other factors that are held responsible for media bias such as ownership of the media organizations, concentration of media ownership, the selection of staff, the preferences of an intended audience etc. Thus, although the reasons can be different but bias prevails in the media.

### REFERENCES

- Allen, Steven J. (2015). Media bias: 8 types [a classic, kinda]. Retrieved from <https://capitalresearch.org/>
- Ceren Budak, Sharad Goel and Justin M. Rao (2016). Fair and balanced? Quantifying media bias through crowdsourced content analysis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **80**, Special Issue : 250–271
- Chomsky, N. (1989). *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*. London: Pluto Press.(p 10)
- DeFleur, Melvin and DeFleur, Margaret (2009). *Mass Communication Theories: Explaining Origins, Processes, and Effects*. Allyn & Bacon.
- D'Alessio, D and Allen, M (2000-12-01). "Media bias in presidential elections: a meta-analysis". *Journal of Communication*. 50 (4): 133–156. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02866.x. ISSN 1460-2466.
- Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *J. Communication*, **43**(4) : 51-58.

- Hard Evidence: analysis shows extent of press bias towards Brexit (2016), <https://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-analysis-shows-extent-of-press-bias-towards-brex-61106>
- Harcup, Tony and O'Neill, Deirdre (2017). What is News?, *Journalism Studies*, **18** (12) : 1470-1488, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193.
- Juneja, Prachi (2018). Breaking News: A Case Study of the Indian Media Industry. Retrieved from <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/case-study-of-indian-media-industry.htm>
- Kenney, K. and Simpson, C. (1993). Was coverage of the 1988 presidential race by Washington's two major dailies biased? *Journalism Quarterly*, **70**(2) : 345-355
- McQuail, D. (1992). Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest. London: Sage
- Media Bias (2018, August 11). In Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved August 19, 2018, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media\\_bias#cite\\_note-9](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_bias#cite_note-9)
- Panneerselvam, A.S. (2016). Investigating the charges of bias. The Hindu , p. Opinion/ Readers' editor.
- Quackenbush, Daniel (2013). Public Perceptions of Media Bias: A Meta-Analysis of American Media Outlets during the 2012 Presidential Election.. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, **4** (2) (Fall 2013).
- Shoemaker, Pamela J. and Vos, Tim P. (2009). Gatekeeping Theory. New York: Routledge. ISBN 0415981395.
- Stevenson, R. and Greene, M. (1980). A reconsideration of bias in the news. *Journalism Quarterly*, **57**(1) : 115-121.

\*\*\*\*\*